

THE NEW DECAMERON
THE FIFTH DAY

FROM BASIL BLACKWELL'S LIST

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THE NEW DECAMERON

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THE NEW DECAMERON

THE FIFTH DAY

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OXFORD

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THE FIFTH DAY

THE sounds and scents of a Greek harbour, a night of stars, a yacht riding at anchor, a man overboard. Fit setting for our leave-taking of Hector Turpin and his "temperamental" tourists.

I like to think of the yacht as the theatre for this witty, curious Company! No platform like the deck for your true Story Teller. Sinbad knew it; and Apollonius Rhodius; and those heroes who beguiled the hours with stories in the cockpit of the *Argo*, somewhere between Ismarus and Ithaca. . . . "And the captain of the ship said to Antonio, 'Antonio tell us a tale.'"

It may be that the sea lent our Story Tellers a breadth of vision, a facility in narrative, a latitude which another environment denied them. "Recitation easy," would be the forecast, "gullibility good." Certainly, with so much sea all around and about them, salt was to be had for the asking. Here their extravagances appeared less extravagant; their flights not too wildly improbable.

No doubt they were conscious of it. Valentine Herrick, Poet and Yacht-owner, although it has been said of him that he "feared his yacht" (and was therefore, I imagine, a poor poet), knew it.

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Father Anthony, Pillar of Anglo-Catholicism and Barnabas MacWhirter Smith, Professor of Zend Language and Literature in the University of Oxford, sensed it. Henry Scott, of the Psychical Research Society; Peter Brown, the Detective's Friend and Vivian Spencer of the Foreign Office, expressed growing disinclination to put ashore, though Salona invited and Delphi beckoned; and for this reluctance I contend that my theory is accountable.

The Master Printer, it must be admitted, was the one exception. He, of all the crew, was for shore-going. I suspect that Mr. Buck's prejudice was allied to a determination to miss nothing of those distractions which the "Continong" seemingly reserve for his kind. Questioned by the Poet as to how he had liked Paris, he had replied, "Mr. 'errick—flirtin' at Roxminster is in its infancy."

That was all.

But it was only too evident to his fellow tourists that it required but slight provocation to conjure the Master Printer from their circle. He had been the first to man the boat sent in lame pursuit of the fugitive Judas. This was an heroic exhibition of which the blow that had stretched their hostage out upon the deck had been the prelude. After an hour's fruitless search the boat had borne Mr. Buck back to the yacht. But two days later it went forth with the Master Printer again in the bows, having given his promise to return to the protective wing of Mr. Turpin within a week. That week was nearly up.

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Mr. Buck's desertion had left its impress upon at least one of the Fellowship. The Schoolmarm was relieved and regretful. Miss Pogson's disciplined head bade her be grateful for the temporary removal of an "impossible" personality. Miss Pogson's undisciplined heart bade her repine. She mourned him for three days, and on the fourth she found consolation in the person of Mr. Hilary Butterworth, Bear-Leader, Free Lance and Graduate of the University of Cambridge. This young man, a friend of Herrick's, hearing that the Poet's yacht was at anchor off Itca, had come aboard at the Poet's invitation. He had, so he told them, been engaged for the past three months piloting the scions of a Cincinnati Go-getter round the capitals of Europe. At Athens, as per programme, Papa had met them, had relieved Mr. Butterworth of his charges, and left him to spend the balance of his salary in returning to England.

After the first evening at dinner, when the Bear-Leader had sat between the Poet and Miss Pogson, the latter had made it quite evident that she meant to appropriate him. Indeed, there was no competition. Miss Pennock, the Woman Doctor, was inclined to resent the intrusion of the newcomer. Mrs. Dane-Vereker betrayed neither gratification nor resentment. The hand which she gave him told him no more than did her voice, as she spoke her formal welcome in the saloon. If the Master Printer had been an onlooker he would have been hard put to it to guess whether the Lady of Fashion liked Mr.

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Butterworth the less or Mr. Buck the more for this breach in the ranks of the Company.

Behold them then, on this evening of Mr. Butterworth's arrival. The hour is one hour after dinner; the scene, the yacht's white deck. Mr. Turpin has pronounced his *ducdame* and the circle is complete. Somewhere in the rigging a single lamp burns steadily and strews the waters with broken gold. On shore a hundred tiny points of fire tell that the harbour is not yet abed, while above and behind loom those dark austerities, the mountains.

On such a night no prompting is needed and it is with a sense of inevitability that the Company settles down to its business.

"Who shall begin?" queried the Poet.

Mr. Turpin glanced at the Psychic Researcher. "Your turn yesterday," he said. . . . "And to-day?"

"When we were children," said Henry Scott, "we played this game with a strict observance of the rules. One of those rules, if I remember it rightly, allows me to nominate my successor."

He drew his handkerchief from his pocket and flung it deftly on to the lap of the Lady of Fashion.

"*Place aux dames*," he said.

"*Faute de mieux*," laughed Mrs. Dane-Vereker as she picked it up and, without more ado, embarked upon

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE LADY OF FASHION

THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE

SQUIRREL IN A CAGE

By E. M. DELAFIELD

SHE glanced up and down the platform, as she alighted from the train, pretending to herself, and to the ever-present recorder of her days and nights, that she was not actuated by a faint, shadowy hope of seeing Berringer.

He had hardly ever come to meet her train, as a matter of fact, even in the old days of a year ago. But once, at the very beginning, he had been there. She hadn't told him what train she was coming up by, and he had waited at Waterloo station from eleven o'clock until half-past three, so that they might have the additional half-hour together.

Sacha Michaelson had never travelled anywhere by train, since then, without remembering that.

Berringer would never be there any more. For the past three months she'd realised that he was tiring of it. Satiated, because she'd given him all she had to give, and had let him know, with reckless prodigality, the extent of her love.

"She had all the capacity for passion of the

THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE

woman who has southern blood in her veins. An infinite hunger for love looked out of her dark, smouldering gaze."

"Taxi! To No. 103 Frinton Street, please. It's just off Marylebone Road."

"She pulled open the door and stepped into the taxi, the heavy fur border of her velvet coat swinging against her slim legs as she did so. More than one man glanced after the straight, slender figure."

The very last time, probably, that she'd ever go to the Frinton Street room. After all, they hadn't met there so very many times. At first, he'd simply called for her at her club, and they'd gone to lunch or dine at remote Soho restaurants.

On the third of May—would there ever come a time when she'd not remember that date?—she'd been in town for a week, at the three-roomed flat of a cousin who was abroad. And it was after that that Berringer had taken the studio in Frinton Street.

There was a strip of looking-glass in the taxi, and Sacha Michaelson mechanically adjusted her hair beneath her high scarlet hat and passed her tiny powder-puff across her face.

Did it really matter whether she looked pretty or not, to-day? Impossible to believe that it didn't matter, that Berringer wouldn't see. And yet it was in order to end it all, to make a clean break, that she was meeting him to-day.

Sacha remembered her last letter, that she had written in imagination so many times before she had written it on paper.

"Ian, dear—let's be honest, and not spoil

things. We made a compact once, that if either of us grew tired, it should finish—then and there. Not drag on, with expostulations, and scenes—unthinkable between us. Ian, if the time has come now, won't you be honest with me? I shan't make it difficult for you. I'm coming to London on Wednesday and I want to see you, even if it's only to say good-bye. Sacha."

Although it was weeks since he had ceased to answer her letters by return of post, she had the reply to that one immediately, asking her to come to Frinton Street at four o'clock. The real answer lay in the only other sentence that the note contained. "As you say, we swore to be honest with one another. But it's very hard, sometimes, and I'm hating myself now."

She knew it was the end, of course.

No. What he meant was that he couldn't stand the treachery of it—although it was he who had passionately urged, in the beginning, that she owed no loyalty to a husband whom she had never loved. He had come to feel that he could not face Charlie any more. . . .

What he meant was that their love could find its expression in daily letters, in the constant spiritual awareness of one another—that the subterfuges and lies of the Frinton Street rendezvous were a degradation of the most beautiful thing that life could ever hold for either. Long ago, she had said that to him. Now, he saw it like that, too. . . .

What he meant was that they were being imprudent and reckless, risking the discovery

THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE

that would be fatal to their happiness. He had suddenly become afraid—for her, and for the safety of their wonderful, secret life.

What was it he meant?

That he had ceased to love her.

The sword-like stab of that utter certainty went through her again. Ian Berringer was tired of her.

It had been real, too, for him as for her, while it lasted.

For him, now, it had ceased.

Assertion and negation, intuition, and denial, going round and round, to the senseless clamour of the outer world, like the painted horses of a merry-go-round to the mechanical music accompanying its dizzy gyrations.

There was the same faint sense of physical sickness that a too-prolonged gazing at the merry-go-round would have produced.

The grinding wheels of the taxi jarred in stopping as the merry-go-round might have jarred.

"She wrenched open the door, and stepped out of the taxi, the heavy fur border of her velvet coat swinging . . . her slim, ungloved hand found the coins in her purse . . . she paid the driver. . . ."

She had a key, and she let herself into the narrow, secretive-looking house, and went up the steep stairs.

She and Berringer had agreed long ago that it was wiser for him to await her inside the studio. Her heart was beating so quickly that she stopped for an instant outside the shut door on the second floor.

Always, the near approach of that moment when she would see him again had made her heart throb wildly, and always she had paused, in an ineffectual attempt to regain control of her racing breath, behind the door.

In the early days, he had torn open the door and his hands had drawn her over the threshold. Later, he had waited inside the room, his face turned to the door. And once—the last time she had been there—he had been waiting at the table in the window and had sprung up at the sight of her, with vague, startled eyes, and the exclamation: "I never heard you arrive!"

As usual, her desperate attempt to visualise him clearly before they actually met, failed. Every mental and emotional faculty was absorbed in a passion of anticipation.

"Her hand was shaking as she opened the door and sharply closed it behind her."

Berringer faced her as she entered.

He was standing by the window, his hands thrust into his pockets, and he was shifting the weight of his body from his heels to the balls of his feet, with a very characteristic movement.

The sense of his virility, his height, his masculine strength, rushed over her again. The light, startling grey of his eyes in his swarthy face—the heavy line of his dark, irregular brows, the jut of his lower lip—all came as so many vivid impressions thrust upon her recognition.

"Sacha."

"Ian."

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"Her proud, delicate air of aloofness made it impossible for him to touch her."

She moved blindly towards him, suffering, incredibly, more because he had hesitated.

He looked at her for an instant—at her mouth, not into her eyes—and then kissed her. She could only remember, with a vividness that appalled her, their other kisses, prolonged until pain and ecstasy had mingled.

"She sank into a chair, her knees trembling beneath her. She raised her heavy-lidded hazel eyes to his, and he saw that she must have wept all night."

"And how is Sacha?" His voice held the inflexions that belonged to it when he was ill at ease.

He had begun the balancing movement again, shifting his weight from heels to toes, his hands in his pockets.

"You got my letter?"

"Yes, I got your letter."

After the pause, he laughed uneasily.

"Of course I got it, or I shouldn't have known you were coming up to-day, should I? Besides, I answered it."

"Of course you did. How stupid of me!"

Inanities, to try and lighten the all but unendurable tension between them.

"She was a brave woman—the bravest that he had ever known. He realised that she was in hell, and giving no sign of it."

It was difficult to speak, but to bear the silence was more difficult still.

"Ian, you must tell me. Is there somebody else?"

She could see that he was instantly relieved. The balancing movement stopped, and he looked her straight in the face at last. "No. I swear to you that there isn't, Sacha."

"You aren't going to marry—some girl?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"It's only that—you're tired of it. The thing has just naturally come to an end?"

"I expect—d'you mind if I smoke?—I expect that——"

"Of course—please do."

"A cigarette?"

He held out his case.

"I'm sorry—I've none of the kind you like."

Did he remember, as she did, that there had been a time when his case had always been supplied, for her, with the Russian cigarettes that she liked?

"No, thank you, I won't smoke. I've got some of my own, somewhere."

"Sure you won't?"

"Quite sure, thanks."

He struck a match, shielding the flame very carefully with strong, blunt finger-tips, from some imaginary draught.

She moistened her dry lips with the tip of her tongue.

"What were you going to say, Ian?"

"Only that—that I expect, if we're to be honest, Sacha—we're both in the same boat. We've both got to the stage of realising that it—it was wonderful while it lasted, but it isn't

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really the thing we took it for. Not, I mean, something that's going to last a lifetime. Perhaps nothing ever is."

The forlorn sound that came from his lips might have passed for a laugh. His eyes implored her to help him. If he could feel that she believed in his belief that their satiety was mutual, he wouldn't feel like a cad. That was what he meant.

"She had always understood him, and she did not fail him now. With heartbreak in her eyes, her mouth lied gallantly. She was the bravest woman that he had ever known."

No. It was too hard.

"She had always been honest with him, and not even for pride's sake would she lie to him now. She was the most honest woman that he had ever known.—and the bravest."

"There's something about me you've not understood yet, Ian. I'm faithful. You're the only man that's ever counted for anything in my life. You'll be the only one, always. No one, except Charlie, has ever even kissed me, except you. You know it's true."

"Yes."

He had marvelled over it, in the past, and told her that she had come to him almost like a young girl to her first lover.

"Ian, with me it's for always. I don't mind saying it to you, because after this we shan't ever see one another again. I've known that it was going to end, of course—that you were—getting over it. I—I'm glad you've told me the truth."

" ' I—I'm glad you've told me the truth.' There was the slightest possible break in her voice, but her steady gaze never faltered . . . the bravest woman that he had ever known."

" It was the compact, that we should tell one another the truth, Sacha."

" I know."

" God knows I've felt a hound. I could shoot myself."

How unconvincing! He felt wretched, and angry, and uncomfortable. Not really unhappy, with the unhappiness that tears and rends the spirit as torture tears and rends the body; that returns again and again in the night, to turn darkness, and quiet, and solitude into things of unspeakable dread.

" A clean break is the only possible way to end it. That's why I came up to-day—for the last time. So that we could say good-bye."

Once before, they'd said good-bye. At the very beginning, when she had told him that it was their duty to part, and after long argument he had given in, and agreed that they should meet as friends, but never as lovers.

" But we shall always know that we care," he'd said then, holding her in his arms.

And the poignancy of their farewell, of their last despairing kisses, had reached the point at which pain is merged into a veritable refinement of bliss.

She had gone away that time, her eyes aching and smarting from the tears that she had shed, but upheld by the glory of their shared renuncia-

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tion, and with the ever-present consciousness of Ian's awareness of her, and of her courage and pain, like a song in her heart.

Now, again, she would have to go away, and this time with the bleak, stark knowledge that her suffering was unshared, and unrecognised. It was impossible, because intolerable, that he should not recognise it.

"It's over. We won't go on writing, or anything. Only, tell me what's made you change? I shall understand."

"Looking up at him, she even achieved the supreme gallantry of a smile. But he saw that the slim hands were gripped together until the knuckles showed white."

"That's—that's very sporting of you, Sacha."

His voice held great embarrassment. Perhaps he was wondering whether she remembered that once he had said he should eschew slang because she hated it so.

"I always have understood, Ian, haven't I?"

He made no reply.

Suddenly anger flared up in her.

"You know I have. You can't say I'm not making it easy for you. You can't say that I haven't always understood you, from the very beginning. When have I failed you, ever?"

"It's not that—you haven't, I know. But no man can live on the heights, always, Sacha. Oh, it's my inadequacy, I know. Put it down to that, if you want a reason. I couldn't—live on the heights."

"The face that looked up at him was white to the lips."

"Have I been exacting, Ian?"

"Yes. You're forcing me to say it. God knows I didn't want to."

"And if I—I were to be less exacting?"

The words wrenched at her pride all but unendurably. Stronger than her pride was the insane hope that by the sacrifice of it she might regain his love.

"Sacha, don't! What's the use? Nothing can bring dead things to life again. Forget me as fast as you can. It shouldn't be difficult. You'll find someone else—less unworthy. . . . Don't think I don't despise myself. I know what you must think of me—you've been as generous as a woman could be—and I'm letting you down."

"Ian, Ian, don't you understand that whatever you do to me I'm yours, always and absolutely?"

"It was a cry of selfless, passionate love. He caught his breath at the wonder of it. Something broke within him, and the next moment he was on his knees beside her, his arms round her, his face against her breast. They were together again."

"For heaven's sake, Sacha, don't let's have a scene. Look here, I can't stand this——"

"You want me to go?"

"I want to make an end of this. (Good God, what a brute I am!) I'll go, if you like, and you stay here and—and rest till it's time for your train. Look here, shall I tell the woman to bring you up a cup of tea or something?"

She shook her head, speechless.

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"She shook her head, speechless. It had come. Instinctively she rose to her feet, and faced him without flinching. She was the bravest woman he had ever known."

"You aren't going to faint, are you?"

"No, I'm not going to faint, Ian."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

The impatience in his voice was like the rasp of a file.

"Nothing. You'd better go. I can't bear any more."

"Sacha, I'm sorry—you must believe that I'm sorry. I shouldn't ever have told you, only I knew you'd find out for yourself."

All the time, he was edging towards the door. His hand was grasping eagerly at the handle.

"If ever—you want me again—Ian——"

Had she said that?

"Sacha—I—O good *Lord!*"

He had opened the door, and in an instant it had shut behind him, with a hard, defiant sound.

At one moment she had seen his dark, tormented face, beneath its black plume of hair, his thick, hirsute hands, his broad shoulders, and at the next moment he was gone, and she could not visualise him clearly any more than she had ever been able to visualise him clearly in his absence.

Impossible to suffer like this and live. There must somewhere be a breaking-point, a limit to endurance. . . .

"She found that she was tearing her lace handkerchief to strips between her fingers. Her arms

were outflung across the table, her head pressed against them, whilst sobs shook her from head to foot. She never heard the door open, nor Ian Berringer's step across the room. His arms were round her in the old, protective clasp, and his lips had found hers, before she saw him. . . ."

Silence, heavy and deathly, hung over the room. It was broken by her own sobs and stifled half-screams.*

There was no step upon the stairs.

Berringer did not come back.

Sacha Michaelson, after a long while, got up and gazed at her disfigured face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. Her nose and mouth were hideously swollen, her eyes sunken in discoloured sockets. A patch of crimson under each lower lid stood out upon the livid pallor of her face. With exactly the same mechanical gesture that she had used in the taxi, she touched the hair beneath her hat brim, and passed the little powder-puff across her face.

She dragged herself down the stairs and into the street.

A taxi crawled past her and she signed to the driver.

"Waterloo station."

"She raised eyelids, that felt curiously stiff with crying, to the man's face, and he thought he had never seen so sad a look before. She stepped into the taxi—the heavy fur border of her velvet coat . . ."

The wheels of the taxi bore her away, to the noise and the restless, incessant movement of Waterloo station.

THE LADY OF FASHION'S TALE

She glanced round the vast booking-hall, pretending to herself, and to the ever-present recorder of her days and nights, that she was not actuated by a faint, shadowy hope of seeing Berringer.

For fully a minute after Mrs. Dane-Vereker had finished no one spoke. The silence was broken by Dr. Pennock.

"The Ever Present Recorder: a disturbing Familiar! I think at one time or another most of us have heard him."

"Her," corrected the Professor. "Her sex is betrayed, if by nothing else, by her insistence." He looked at the Courier. "I am sure that Turpin's is already at work. She says: *'Never was there so discerning a Courier; never so versatile a company.'*"

Mr. Turpin's gesture indicated that the Professor had read him aright. "The story suggests . . ." he began, but got no further.

For Mr. Herrick, without invitation, had already embarked upon

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE POET

THE POET'S TALE

THE GATES

By L. A. G. STRONG

CRASH !

Old Sam Henniker leaped up in his bed, knowing on the instant what had happened : the 7.1 had fouled the gates. He knew at once, because he had dreamed the disaster scores of times, starting bolt upright, to be reassured by darkness and quiet all around. But this was more terrible than the dream : over and above the splintering of wood and the grind of lacerated metal came a fearful bumping, a thud which shook the house, and, at the end of all, a forlorn tinkle of broken glass.

She'd fouled the gates. He must have overslept horribly. Then his alarm-clock had not gone off. Shaking from head to foot, he tumbled out of bed and ran over to it. Peering at it in the half-light, he saw, with a cold, sick feeling, that it had not been set overnight. And all this in a few seconds : the steam of the train was still drifting sluggishly over the misty fields, as Sam stood there in his nightshirt, the clock in his hand, staring upon tragedy.

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He had forgotten to set the clock. That was worse, to Sam, than the disaster it had entailed. Punctual, accurate, regular in his habits as a machine, he had always switched off the alarum on getting up each morning, lest in the afternoon it should disturb the house with an unmeaning summons, and reset it before going to bed at night. He had done it for more years than he could reckon. And last night, suddeñly, inexplicably, he had gone to bed without setting it—and had overslept—and the 7.1 had fouled the gates.

But he was a railwayman still; and so he roused himself quickly, slipped on his coat, trousers, and peaked cap, and went down to survey the damage. In the grey wet morning light it was plain to see. Above the crossing the line curved, which prevented the driver of the train from getting a view of the gates till he was almost upon them. Of course, he should whistle, but there were few formalities on the little single line, and Sam's reputation for punctuality would in any case have been his own undoing: moreover, even if the driver had whistled, it would have been too late. The train had evidently taken the obstacle at full speed. One gate—the second—had been flung bodily aside, and seemed to have suffered little damage: but the other was dashed to pieces. The heavy post, torn from its socket in the ground and dragged for several yards by its twisted metal bar, had smashed a corner of the fence and fetched up against Sam's oilhouse; that accounted for the bumping noise. Bits of

metal and wood were scattered all about the line ; there was a great scar across the painted woodwork of the little ground frame hut, and its window was broken. Even then Sam wondered that in the midst of such huge destruction he should have heard this little sound so clearly.

Well, his job was plain before him. The metals were clear, but he proceeded to move any fragments that might possibly be in the way of the upcoming train, and then turned back to the house to dress.

At the door he was met by his little grandson, with white wondering face and round eyes. The boy looked up at him, and his lips moved in silent question.

"Train. Fouled gates," said Sam gruffly, with a funny backward swing of his arm towards the disaster ; and he brushed past the boy and stumped upstairs.

As he lathered his chin before the little cracked glass by the window, he heard the arrival of Mrs. Jarvis, who "did" for them. "Oooh my !" she said, "Wattever——"

He lost the rest, but could hear the boy's voice answer her, and their hushed voices as they gazed upon the destruction. Sam gritted his teeth. Then he heard her, as usual, moving about in the kitchen, getting the breakfast ready.

A few minutes later, he was sitting opposite his grandson at the table, outwardly as much the martinet as ever ; but he found it hard to meet the boy's eyes. Never troubling, as a rule, to read another's thought, he could see criticism

THE POET'S TALE

grow each moment in his grandson's mind. Grandfa, so punctual, so unfailing, so merciless to the slovenly or forgetful; grandfa, by whom the people set their clocks of a Saturday as he went down to the village for his evening glass; grandfa had overslept, and let the train smash up the gates. Grandfa had made a terrible mistake. Grandfa. The child's world rocked upon its foundation; slowly, with the full tide of inevitable knowledge, he was learning that grandfa was only a man, an ordinary man, liable as any other man to make mistakes. And the old man saw it all, and suffered torments. He wanted to say, "Swally up thy porridge, don't thee stare to me!" but somehow he could not. Still, age was age, and right was right; so presently, with a real effort of courage, he looked up and met the accusing eyes.

"Come along with 'ee," he said gruffly. "'Tis getting late."

The boy's eyes dropped at once, and he finished up the remains of his porridge. After that they did not speak at all; and the boy, as soon as they left the table, got his satchel and started off for school, guiltily. He saw already that the disgrace would affect him as well, that there would be questions to answer, and jeers to bear; and suddenly he realised that he loved his grandfather, and longed to defend him. He had always spoken, at school, as if the work of the crossing was shared between them. "Us lets train through," he would say, and describe the process in detail to an interested circle. Well, this morn-

ing, what would he say? "Us oversleaped, and train fouled gates."

"Granfa oversleaped. . . ."

"Grandfa forgot to set the clock, so us oversleaped. . . ."

"Us forgot to set the clock. . . ."

No; there was no need to go that far; he was always in bed long before the clock was set. "Granfa. . . ." "Us. . . ." He shuffled along the lane, in the gutter, struggling. . . .

As soon as Mrs. Jarvis, frightened and constrained, had hurried the breakfast things from the table and shut the scullery door behind her, the old man sat with his pipe unlighted, and tried to cope with the disaster which had befallen him. It was as if a devil had flung into the regularity of his life this unforeseen and unbelievable horror. He was a good, steady man; said his prayers daily to the Lord, and attended meeting regularly; more than that, there was a class of boys who assembled respectfully, every Sunday afternoon, to hear Mr. Henniker expound the Word of God. Bruised and bewildered, he searched his conscience, and could find no sin, no backsliding, to warrant this cruel visitation. 'Tis a dream, he thought, and half rose from his chair; but even through the window he could see enough, and he sat down again.

The 8.40 up found Sam, as ever, in the little ground frame hut, looking grimly out at the broken window. He heard it whistle, excessively and ostentatiously below the straight, and set his jaw. There would be a deal of this sort of thing

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to face. They'd have had a fine tale, down at the station ; they'd none of them be sorry to get one in on old Sam Henniker. Old Sam, who had refused to come out on strike ; who had argued so uncompromisingly, in the bar of the Blue Boar, against shorter hours, the modern labouring man, the unpunctuality and thriftlessness of the young ; oh, they'd have it in for old Sam, all right. But Joe the driver, as he passed, made him a face of comic dismay, in which there was no unkindness. " Well, you 'ave been and gone and done it, and no mistake," the face said, not without sympathy ; and to his amazement, Sam instinctively made a grimace in return. Then he was angry with himself for wanting sympathy.

Traffic on the road was limited to bakers' carts and a farmer or two on a nag ; but to-day, these, stopping at the crossing, gaping at the damage, and commenting thereon, made up by concentration for their lack of numbers. Never had the place seemed so populous. Sam eyed them grimly ; they speculated among themselves upon the causes of the disaster, looking sideways at him, but none ventured to ask the old man a direct question.

That afternoon Sam sat down and penned his official report of the accident. It was brief and bare : the work of a proud man, humble in so far as he was at fault, but neither asking for, nor expecting, pardon. In his own eyes the offence was unforgivable. He would show no mercy to a subordinate who had committed it, and he

found none for himself. His one duty had been to keep the line clear for six trains a day, and he had failed to do so. Thirty years of such service, ever since the line was opened, counted in his mind for nothing. It was the unpardonable offence, and, by some mysterious fate which he could not understand, he, of all men, had committed it.

It was not till two days afterwards that a gang arrived to put up a new pair of gates. Sam, fearing men who knew him, was relieved to see a regular gang from a town quite thirty-five miles distant. He found, with something of a shock, that they took the accident much as a matter of course. They talked of other things; and when he fought down his pride sufficiently to ask if they had much work of the kind, they reassured him with ready sympathy. Bless him, yes. Why, one gate on the Tilton line had been broken twice inside three months.

"You won't get the sack, master, not as 'tis the first time," added one, misunderstanding him.

Sam stiffened all over, went abruptly into the house, and sat on a chair in the kitchen. He would have liked to be angry: he ought to have been angry, he told himself fiercely, and put the young chap in his place; yet in some curious way his heart could not help recognising the rough kindness, and being grateful for it.

"Takes it 'ard, 'e do," said one of the men to another; and when, presently, they laughed over another matter, Sam savagely supposed that they were laughing at him, and marched down to

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the farthest corner of his neat vegetable garden to be out of sight and hearing.

The next day was Saturday, Sam's evening for visiting the inn. He spent the day fighting his fears. All would laugh and sneer at him. For long years he had checked and censured them, so stern with himself, so unfailing in his own life that they could not grudge his right to find fault. Now he had failed. But to stay away would be cowardice. He became angry, unfair. Why need he mind them, the trash? What did it matter what they said? and he stumped fiercely down the long hill to the village.

He was right—there was a change. Women, gossiping at their doors in the soft failing light, hushed their voices and stared at him—with pity, could he have seen it. Children playing in the gutters paused to look, with open mouths. The unhappy man, his eyes fixed on the road, felt as if heads and mocking voices were closing in behind him, dark and chuckling, as the waters close behind a boat at nightfall. He reached the inn; for just a second he hesitated on the sandy threshold, then entered boldly.

He scarcely noticed who was in the bar. There was a group in one corner. He ordered his glass, and sat lonely on the big settle farthest from the fire, which had just been lit, and was burning brightly but indecisively. There had been a murmur of greeting as he came in, and he had heard himself answer. Misery crushed and scalded him. He had felt little in his life—none since Ann had died; never anything shameworthy,

like this ; he was not accustomed to such suffering, and he bore it hard. They were talking among themselves. A curse rose suddenly and bitterly in old Sam's heart. Ordinarily it would have shocked him, for he never swore. Yet it came naturally now. Well, let them talk, the —— ! He suddenly realised that he had drunk all his beer, without tasting it, and that his mouth was still dry and thirsty. His eyes smarted, and a pain ran down his side and down his legs. Then there was a movement in the group, and a man approached and stood over him—Jim Watkins. Sam turned up to him a face of animal defiance.

"Sam," said the man, "come and have a drink with us, and cheer thee up."

Sam swallowed with stiff jaws, and looked at him without speaking. A second man rose from the group, and joined Watkins.

"You've had a misfortin', Sam," he said, "and us be sorry for't. You'm a proud man, a steady-going man, and nobody likes to 'ave their mistakes spoke much of, you least of all. Still, 'tis a misfortin', and us be sorry ; and us would take it very kind if you would come and have a drink with us, in token of goodwill."

Tears rose to the red rims of Sam's eyes. It was dead against his principles to take a second glass, but he must now. His heart warmed to the men.

"Thank 'ee," he answered huskily ; "you're very kind, and I'll be glad."

An hour later he was on his way home, walking furiously fast, as ever, his heart warm with grati-

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tude and an unaccustomed heat of liquor. For the first time since the crash he felt almost happy. It wasn't so bad after all. He had misjudged the good folk sinfully : he must pray to be forgiven that. Kind folk, they were. Tears came to his eyes, happy tears, for the drink had made him emotional, and his quick steps were a little unsteady. Everyone made a mistake sometimes. It wasn't so bad. He stamped his feet hard on the rough road, and took the steep finish of the hill at a pace which few young men in the district could have equalled. He came out upon the dark moor above the crossing ; a bullock was lying in the road, and he bore down upon it. "Hoy !" he barked, and the animal rose lumberingly and let him pass. He even whistled a few long-forgotten notes, as the shape of the house loomed up, and the white paint of the new gates showed faint and ghostly in the darkness.

The next morning he felt ill, and would have liked to stay away from meeting ; yet that, again, would seem cowardice. He put down his cup, seized with a sudden fear that someone might be inspired to pray in his behalf. A sweat stood out on him, and he gulped his tea blindly. Then reason came back. They might do it if he were away, but far less likely if he were there. They wouldn't have the brass, he thought, with a gleam of his old spirit. So he went off, with his grandson trotting at his side, and sat and knelt with throbbing head, his fears ebbing from him as the service wore on to its end.

He went to bed early that night, to be in readi-

ness for the morrow. The alarum was left permanently set now: its tinkle, feeble in the daylight, sounded every afternoon, half comforting, half worrying him. The passing of the trains was getting on his nerves. He dared scarcely let himself go off to sleep now. Suppose the alarum went wrong, did not work. It had failed once, many years before, but without evil consequence. He had cured it by putting it in the big vat of paraffin oil from which the lamps were filled. There it had lain for three weeks, till the supply ran out, and had been rescued in perfect order, but with a face the colour of brown paper: and it had behaved magnificently ever since. (Sam, incidentally, had caused much annoyance by his invariable recommendation of this treatment for all the deranged clocks in the neighbourhood.) Well, it had answered for his own; why not? The clock had kept time ever since. But suppose it should fail again? It was old: clocks wore out. He sat up in his bed, and listened to its strong tick-tock on the chest of drawers. That was all right. He lay down again, slept perhaps a little, and woke with a start. Was it fancy, or did the ticking sound weaker? Ah—it seemed to falter then. And so on, and so on, up and down, like a head bobbing on the sea of consciousness, now under, now up again.

In the small hours he leaped up and listened, trembling. No; all was still. He had dreamed his old dream again.

After that he could not sleep, nor even stop trembling. He lay flat on his back, gripped the

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bedclothes, and jammed his feet against the end of the bed in his efforts at control, but his shaking only stopped when his muscles ached from the tension, and he lay sorely tired, his eyes burning in their sockets, wishing for day.

When the alarum did go off it woke him with a shock: he must have just dropped off. He lay a minute, and almost went to sleep again. Frightened, he dressed unsteadily, yawning and blinking, and stood in the ground frame hut, when the train went through, a sick old man.

The new gates were finished. Neighbours, coming to look at them, were kind. Why, they declared, it was a good thing he had let the train go through the old ones. Company would have had to replace them soon, anyway. He had only speeded 'em up a bit. And the new Sam listened almost wistfully, with a smile, to the nonsense which he would so fiercely have rebuked ten days before.

"Have improved old Sam no end, that there accident have," was the local verdict. "Much more 'uman, it have made en."

"Aha. Nothin' like misfortin' to bring a man in line with his fella bein's."

"Or a woman, too."

"O' course, Joe. I meant a 'uman, not only a male man."

"Aw."

But Sam was losing in vitality what he gained in gentleness of heart. The nights which had been brief intervals of unbroken sleep were now long shivering ages, broken by hideous dreams.

Gigantic engines shrieked along the line : he would run to open the gates, but always fail. Sometimes the lighted train, with a rending as of the crack of doom, would rush grinning by ; at other times it would bear down upon him as he struggled with the gates—be on top of him—the crash would be all about him—and he would wake with shut, quivering eyelids, convinced that he was dead, and become wearily conscious of his body still whole and aching on the bed. Soon he came to pray that he might not awaken, but that the dream-train might finish all.

His thin face grew thinner, and yellow ; his eyes were sunken in his head, their red rims redder than ever, his hand shook as he hung up the lamp upon each gate, and he became gentle and weary, like a sick dog. For the first time in many, many years, he missed Ann. She would have looked after him. On the few occasions when he was ill in her lifetime, he had been a crotchety invalid, and she gentle, patient, and firm ; laughing and soothing him out of his tantrums. 'Twould be easier for her now. And then he remembered that, if she were alive, she would be old like himself, and not the girl of those days. . . .

Memories, sights and sounds and touches forgotten, were coming back to him. A white comb and thick, dark hair. A warmth at night, and murmured words. He smiled through his pain in the darkness, and felt something of the sunshine of long-buried days. Then pain conquered : he was alone.

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"Ann," he whispered. Then, louder, "Ann."

He coughed, and fell asleep. When the alarm woke him, after several hours, he felt very tired, but happier, as if something more than sleep had made the hours good. That was Friday morning. He coughed a lot in the afternoon, and the next night his legs would not carry him to the village for his visit to the inn.

On Sunday he had a pain in his chest and felt light-headed; and the next morning, when he awoke in fearful pain, it was broad day, and there were people in the room. A sudden dread stabbed him; he tried to struggle up, but could not speak.

"It's all right," the doctor told him quickly, "the gates were opened all right. No harm done."

Sam sank back. Then a slow question formed between his puzzled eyes. His lips shaped it painfully.

"Who?"

"The boy—your grandson. He couldn't waken you, so he did it himself, and sent word down for me. A rare good boy, that."

A blank: afternoon light. The evening star shining very clearly in at the open window: open much wider than usual. The doctor had had the window-sash taken right out. A large fire roared in the grate. Shadows leaped on the wall . . . sometimes they were friendly, sometimes terrible, like engines rushing down on him. . . . A poultice—on his back. Ah-h.

He was young again. He and Ann wandered

by the seashore, and picked up shells. She had bare feet. They came into a little corner of the sandhills, and he kissed her. She laughed happily, and they walked slowly along, his arm around her waist. They talked a lot. He tried to remember what they said, to tell the nurse. It was a wonderful plan they had made, but he could not remember any of it.

On Wednesday morning a letter came from the company. They had deliberated upon his case, and, serious though his breach of duty had been, in consideration of his otherwise unblemished record they had decided to continue him in his post without fine or prejudice to his pension.

Neighbours made several attempts to read Sam this document, but they could not be sure whether he understood it. He seemed happy, and whispered to himself from time to time ; but it was not clear if he knew where he was, or heard what was said to him.

"He must have took it in ; he seems so happy, like," whispered his daughter-in-law.

"'Twould ha' broke his heart if company had gived en the sack, or retired en."

"Doctor don't think he've heared not a word since early dawn."

So the question remained unsolved, and Sam died at about five o'clock that afternoon. Neighbours talked far into the night, searching out the justice and the meaning of it all : whether, if such an accident had happened earlier in his life, it would have softened him, without proving mortal. Just as he had become human and fit

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for society, he had been taken from it. They wondered what difference it would have made had his wife lived, and asked each other many such questions. They felt little personal grief, only a pleasant warmth of sorrow; they wished they could have shown some especial kindness to the old man, and they felt aware of life's strangeness and mystery.

The low hum of their voices sounded outside the house. The orange light in the parlour window showed brighter than usual, and occasionally a head could be seen moving across the blind. A man on a horse passed down the road, and wondered idly at the sound of voices. It was bright moonlight; the metals gleamed, and the new gates showed very white and clear.

"Thank you," said Professor Scott and Mr. Spencer together.

"Poor man," said Mr. Pogson, "I think that's so dreadful. Like a reprieve coming after the axe has fallen."

Mr. Turpin suddenly smiled. "Talking of reprieves . . ."

"No; trains," remarked the Professor gravely. "Trains. And that's a reminder. I should like to give you if I may

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PROFESSOR"

THE PROFESSOR'S TALE

NEXT STOP BAKER STREET

By GERALD BULLETT

WHEN the girl with Mary's eyes entered the train at Oxford Circus and took the seat opposite his own, Harrington forgot the woman at his side, forgot the career in India from which he was now retired, forgot even, a moment later, the girl herself; and his mind darting back forty years—it couldn't be less—he remembered how it was at Cambridge in May Week that he had first encountered Mary, and followed her fixedly, unreasoning, like a lout as he told himself, up Jesus Lane and down Trinity Street and King's Parade, and, with a pang of terror lest he was losing her for ever, watched her turn in at the gates of King's College. "Now whose sister is she, whose cousin or whose aunt?" he asked himself, in an attempt to be jolly that was almost hysterical. A night or two later, at his own College Ball, he discovered that she was nobody's sister but merely the betrothed of Ralph Gandy, a blood of a fellow, a rowing man, with whom he was on nodding terms. She

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herself, without bluntly stating it, allowed this fact to be inferred from the light remarks with which she answered his speaking silences, his eager excited stammering half-hints that were more eloquent than an embrace, as he led her, between dances, through the cool cloisters to the incredible moon-quilted lawn and said, with an air of achieving something final and significant : " This is the Outer Court. We can talk here."

And they had talked indeed, but his memory of that talk was overlain by what happened two years later in Ullswater, where at the very door of his cottage he saw her for the second time. She was wearing a homespun Norfolk jacket and skirt, and her small face, tanned by the weather, was shadowed by a beaver hat ; but recognition was instant and mutual. She had, as she had had even when dressed for dancing, the quietly exultant look of one who has emerged triumphant and unruffled from a battle with a strong wind ; but her eyes—dark, deep, intent—were windows veiling a world of which no phrase of his could begin to express the wonder, the magic, the limitless enchantment. To that magic, after two years of diligently persuading himself that it had been illusion, a glamour compounded of moonlight and young blood, he knew himself thrall.

" Mary Frobisher ! "

She met his steady look without faltering. " You're Harrington ! " she said. " They didn't tell me your other name. What are you doing here ? "

"Making holiday, alone. And my first name is Lance. It's time you knew. There's a lot I must say to you. It's been accumulating for two years."

"Why don't you ask me how I came here?" said Mary Frobisher. "Have you no ordinary curiosity, Mr. Harrington?"

"I don't care how you came here. You're here, that's enough. And we're going to beat things out together, you and I. Let's walk . . . unless you're tired and will sit down in this cottage of mine?"

"I'm not tired."

"Good. Then let's walk." They swung off down the road together. "We can think better walking, and talk better. You remember where we left off? We'll just go on from there. You do remember?"

She flashed at him a grave dark glance. "There are things one doesn't forget."

"Yes. And you haven't changed at all, Mary. You're just the same. By God, you're the same," he repeated exultantly under his breath.

"And you," she remarked, with a touch of irony, "are not very different. You go too fast, Harrington, and . . . too far."

"I walk too fast, do you mean?" he perversely suggested.

A little impatient exclamation rebuked him. "That's not worthy of you, to pretend to be stupid."

"Yes, you're right," he said soberly. "We'll have no pretences. And you mustn't say I go

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too fast. There's been a long silence between us, and I've no time to waste. Are you married ? ”

She nodded. “ I'm Mrs. Ralph Gandy.”

“ But you're . . . alone here ? ”

“ Ah,” she said, “ you should have put me the conventional question, as I did to you. And then I should have told you.”

“ Tell me now.”

“ I've run away,” said she, with a glint in her eye and an adorable little toss of the head. “ Oh, nothing scandalous. At least nothing ultimately scandalous.”

“ You've run away.” He sighed, infinitely satisfied ; then asked, after a minute's silent walking : “ For good, I hope ? ”

“ For my own good,” she answered, “ but not for ever. I was bored. When I feel better I shall go back to the others.”

“ Where are . . . the others ? ”

She waved an arm vaguely in a southerly direction. “ Over there. About ten miles away. My husband, my sister-in-law, my mother. Quite a little party of us. I came away this morning, at early dawn, and a very lovely dawn it was, let me tell you. I scribbled a note to say that I was going a long walk, shouldn't be back for a week, and they were not to worry.”

“ I see.” He expressed no surprise.

“ You're shocked, Lance Harrington,” she accused him.

“ You're a liar, Mary Frobisher, and you know it,” he retorted. “ I'm not shocked. I'm not even surprised. I'm too busy thanking God

for sending you to me. And now tell me what made you want to take this very sensible step ? ”

“ I was suffering from a surfeit.”

“ A surfeit of being married ? ”

“ Yes, if you like.”

“ Or a surfeit of being married to Ralph Gandy ? ”

She was angry, and did not disguise her anger. “ That’s unpardonable in you ! ” And he thought ecstatically : How right she is, how beautifully, marvellously right !

“ But really,” he protested, “ the distinction’s a valid one.”

“ Ralph is not to be discussed,” she said. “ If we’re to be friends, we must start with that.”

“ You’ve a deuced quick temper, my dear.” He smiled ruefully. “ But I love you like hell.”

What was said after that he couldn’t for the life of him remember, and for such forgetfulness, even after forty years, he was ready to reproach himself. But he remembered all too well the electric excitement of that great tramp together, that flushed intimate searching of each other’s minds and hearts, and the sense that came to both, with the benediction of dusk, of having met, after an agelong division, and of recognising themselves in each other, so that their hearts, thought young Harrington, beat to the same music and their minds confessed the identity. Yet at the door of the cottage constraint for an instant laid a cold finger upon them. “ Take me to the nearest inn,” said Mary. “ It’s high time we thought of that.” But before the words

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were uttered the better plan occurred to him. "You had better sleep here. And I," he hastily added, for the humility and diffidence of young love was now upon him, "I will get myself a bed elsewhere. I assure you," he answered her protests, "it will be infinitely better like that. At the inn, if you go at this time of night, they'll wonder and talk about you. Where's your luggage? Where's your escort? Who are you? I will get the bed ready for you at once." And when the bed was ready they parted. "It's been a lovely day," she said, and their hands met; but Harrington dropped hers with a shy laugh, saying: "How absurd to shake hands! Good night! You'll find some food in the larder, and the milk will be on your doorstep in the morning." She called softly, after his departing figure: "And you, too, if you please, Mr. Harrington." Yes, that he remembered. That was something he couldn't forget, the soft cadence of her speech, the delicate hint of laughter; though the days that followed, nine peerless days, were melted in his memory into a vague beatitude, a shining splendour; nor could he tell exactly when it was, whether early or late, that he, at first so bold, but now with the maturing of his love, the deepening of his adoration, so utterly aware of his unworthiness, found heart and courage to speak at last his desire. "Mary, they'll be looking for you. And it can't be long now before they find you." She considered this statement a while, meeting his look with her bright dark eyes made darker by trouble, made brighter by

that which she could not yet confess. "Yes? And what then?" she asked. "You know," he said, and for a few moments could not speak again. Presently he repeated: "You know. But I must tell you. Let them find you, Mary. Let them find you with me." She did not pretend not to understand him. She only looked at him, smiled wanly, and said: "We'll go for a long walk, Lance, and climb a mountain, and be very strenuous. And another day I'll try to answer you." "Soon?" he urged. "There's not much time left to us." He bent towards her, but she turned away and cried, almost angrily, in a breaking voice: "Don't press me now! Please don't! I must think and decide for myself. It's all so difficult."

How long after that was it that she spoke of going back to London? "In two days, Lance, I shall go back to my husband's house. Tomorrow I shall send two telegrams, one to the place where I left him, and one to London. Poor Ralph, I've treated him a little shabbily." They were sauntering, arm in arm, along the road that led to the cottage—his cottage, where she had slept in solitude since their meeting. "Must you go?" Harrington felt dizzy under the blow that her words dealt him. The beauty of the evening sky—blue-grey and silken, washed by moonlight, with here and there a tingling star—was suddenly an intolerable burden. But he managed to say again, in level tones: "Must you go?" "You don't understand, Lance," she quickly answered him. He waited for her

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to go on speaking, but there followed a long silence upon which their footsteps and their hastening hearts beat out a complex rhythm. Not until they reached the cottage door did she speak again, and there, as they stood facing each other as if for their usual quiet parting, she said: "We needn't say good night." "You mean . . ." he stammered. And she, without answering, flung open the door and entered. He followed—humbly, with bowed head—and closed the door behind him; and it was as if the kingdom of heaven itself had opened to receive him.

That moment, fragile and exquisite as a child's prayer, shone like a pearl in the memory of the grey-haired, sunburnt civil servant in the railway carriage. He was recalled to a sense of his surroundings by the train's having stopped between stations. The voices of his fellow-passengers sounded loud and harsh; and they themselves seemed to become aware of it, for they all suddenly stopped talking. There was utter silence except for the nervous rustling of a newspaper, and the thought flashed from mind to mind: Has there been an accident? Is the train on fire? Train on fire, echoed Harrington's thoughts; and he closed his eyes as if to shut out the intolerable picture those words evoked, a picture which he had never seen save with his mind's eye, but which still, after forty years, had power to force tears from him. His nerves were on edge, his fingers began lightly drumming upon his knee; but when presently the train moved again he was back in an instant with Mary

in the cottage. They lay all night in each other's arms, stammering of this beauty that was greater than any speech could compass, their bodies compact of fire and light, their spirits reaching out to an eternal joy. Waking in the early morning to find her blissfully asleep, he leaned on an elbow and filled his eyes with her loveliness—small elfish face; deep, dusk-tinted spaces between eyebrows and eyes; satin cheeks, olive and roses; mouth confiding as a child's. By God, muttered old Harrington, she was the loveliest thing in the world; and that girl there, he thought, glancing across the carriage, is uncommonly like her. Might be a daughter. Ah no, more likely a grand-daughter. Perhaps, he said, nervously twisting his grey moustache, perhaps *my* grand-daughter; for we never knew the truth of that matter.

2

In the morning she had said, clinging to him with fierce love: "I am yours, Lance, yours everlastingly. But we are not to be discovered here by . . . by poor Ralph. I shall go to London, and wait for him there, and tell him everything, and ask him to start proceedings." And so, after a second shared night at the cottage, she took train to London. . . . And now the obscene thing, the horror of horrors, stalked down upon the musing man, and he bowed his head and closed his eyes again, cowering under the blow, unwilling to recall, even at this distance of time, those days of anguish. But the words *train on*

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fire came back at him like snarling dogs, and he began piecing together, in spite of himself, phrases from the letter she had written him from the nursing home. "One poor woman was killed, and her baby too, and there was a little boy nine years old who lost both legs. So you mustn't pity *me* too much, darling. I'm not even crippled, I shall soon be walking about again, and I shan't mind so long as no one sees me, no dear friends, no lover, no one but strangers. You, Lance, must make up your mind that you're never to see me again. The Mary you knew is dead, the face you loved and the lips she kissed you with—I can't tell you what's been done to them, I can't write any more. Don't try to see me, don't try. I tell you, darling, it would *frighten* you to see me." He went to London at once, to his rooms in Sergeants' Inn, and from there sent her a torrent of burning words asking when he could come to her. "If I mustn't see you, I must talk to you." She answered by telegram: "For your own sake, not mine, don't come." And so for some days a correspondence, entreaty and denial, raged between them; till at last she wrote that he might come.

He was admitted to a dark room, in the darkest corner of which sat a veiled woman. She did not rise to greet him, but her voice, Mary's voice, asked him to sit down. He was a young man riding the full tide of his first romantic passion, but now, for an instant, he was terrified, and a kind of sickness rose in him. But after a silence, mastering himself, he said: "Thank you

for letting me come, Mary. I want to explain things to you." He waited for a sign from her.

"Go on, Lance," she said. "I'm listening."

"I want you, Mary. I want you. You remember saying to me that you were mine everlastingly? Well, I'm here to claim you. I won't let you off your promise, do you hear!"

She tried to laugh, but there were tears in her voice when she answered: "You don't know what you're saying, my dear. You're in a dream. You're in a kind of ecstasy. But what's happened to me is *real*. Real as death."

Shyly he got out of his chair and took one of her hands in his own. "Real enough, God knows, and cruel and . . ." What else was there to say? "But no more real than my love for you, and yours, Mary, for me. It's you I wanted before, and it's you I want now. And if you think I'm just trying to play straight and do the right thing, you're mightily mistaken. I loved your beauty, like hell I loved it. But it's you," he weakly reiterated, "that I want, Mary. . . . Why!" he added, after a moment's throbbing silence, "maybe at this very moment you have my child to care for!"

Mary said: "Go away now. Please go, Lance. I can't bear any more."

"When will you be ready to come to me?" he persisted.

"You're very young, my dear, and I'm very old now. It's like this, Lance. Beauty doesn't matter so much to us when we've got it. Oh, we love it in each other, but we take it for granted,

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and never stop to think, and we like to pretend that what we really love is something else, something that doesn't wither away or get . . . smashed. That's very romantic and nice, Lance, when people are young and in love ; and when they're both old it may come in handy if they're lucky enough not to have learned better. But I'm old and you're not. I'm hideous—yes, hideous—and you're young. You want beauty, and I'm not going to prevent your getting it. Please go now." But he only caressed her hand and murmured endearments the more, so that at last she cried : " Very well. Draw the curtains back, please." He obeyed, trembling. Light entered the room. " And now—look at me." She lifted her veil.

Braced though he was for the shock, it was all he could do to prevent himself crying out in the agony of his sudden, sharp compassion. But he looked steadily, unflinching. " My poor darling Mary ! " Tears started to his eyes, but he brushed them impatiently away and stood, gravely master of himself, deliberately noting all the details of the ravage, as if saying to himself : These are the things I have lost. This inventory occupied but a moment of time ; the next instant, with an involuntary cry of tenderness, he took Mary's face in his hands and bent over it yearningly. " Mary ! " he said. " Mary ! " His voice was excited, eager, a schoolboy's. " Your eyes ! They are as lovely as ever. What does the rest matter ! " He kissed those eyes again and again in rapture. She could not doubt

his sincerity, but instinctively she hid her face as soon as he released her. And presently she said: "Lance, this is the most wonderful thing that's ever happened, to anyone, in all the world. I was dead, and you've brought me to life again. But I'll never marry you, let's have that clear. I'll never marry you or be your lover. I love you too much." All his pleading broke in vain upon the iron of her resolve. "But I do ask one thing of you, Lance. Say nothing of this to Ralph. I've not told him yet about us, about you and me, but I'll tell him soon, at the right moment, and persuade him to divorce me. I shall say I'm going to you again. And then he'll be free. Will you help me in this?" she asked.

Of course, thought old Harrington, I couldn't agree to anything so monstrous. Poor Mary! I wonder if that girl is any relation. . . . The train stopped at a station, and the girl with Mary's eyes rose to go. Harrington, too, began to get out of his seat, for he couldn't bear that she should pass from his sight and knowledge without a word. But someone caught him by the arm, and a woman said: "It's not *our* station, dear." Now what the deuce . . . ! Ah, yes, his wife. He smiled vaguely at her, resuming his seat. The train moved on.

"That's well done," said the Priest, when Mr. Scott had finished. The others nodded.

"Harrington . . . Harrington," mused Mr. Turpin; "a familiar name. I knew a Harrington

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once ; at least I think it was Harrington. It's of no consequence. I remember him only because he told me once a good story. . . ."

Father Anthony rapped his pipe on the arm of his chair. "Not an uncommon name," he said. "Not at all uncommon. I have known three Harringtons, and could a tale unfold. But I won't. I would much prefer that you should hear, instead,

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PRIEST"

THE PRIEST'S TALE

THE SURPRISED GHOST

By CICELY HAMILTON

THE Ghost in question, while he dwelt in the flesh, was a person of unusual consequence. On special occasions, when he walked abroad, he was greeted with flag-waving, with shouting, and the blare of bands ; and even on normal, ordinary days he had but to show himself for heads to uncover and soldiers to stand rigid in salute. What he said, as a rule, was agreed to with deference, what he ordered was promptly carried out ; further, he had but to speak the word, and horse, foot, and guns moved forward. In the course of his lifetime he spoke it more than once ; and his horse, foot, and guns moved to such good purpose that large slices were carved off his neighbours' frontiers and the shape of their territories suffered considerable change. So much so that educational authorities, all the world over, were put to the expense of new maps and geography primers. He was of so much importance in the land of the living that, when the news went round that he was stricken with illness and like to die, journalists of all peoples, nations,

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and languages turned up bulky files in their editorial offices and made notes on his lineage and personal appearance, on his victories, his love-affairs, and the rest of his deeds and his misdeeds. And when later messages announced that recovery was impossible and the end very near, long columns of praise and long columns of venom were writ hastily and set up in type—while newspaper authorities made ready the posters which should flare the next message to the public. For his funeral excursion trains were run, at cheap rates, from the provinces, and in the procession rode princes, high warriors, and ambassadors; the streets through which it passed were black with gazers and heavy with the roll of muffled drums.

As a ruler of men, in his life he had known little solitude; but, like all his fellow-creatures, he passed in naked loneliness through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. At the gate of the Valley obedience and loyalty halted perforce; but so long as the breath was in their sovereign's body, his servitors were round him, waiting orders that would never be given. Even when his eyes were glazing and his fingers twitched feebly on the counterpane, they addressed him as one who had a right to rule when they bent down to whisper in his ear. There came a time—his mind was still lucid, though the end was very near—when he realised the irony of familiar terms of reverence when addressed to his own poor helplessness. "Majesty," someone had called him—as in days when he rode with his soldiers and consulted with his Ministers of State! A

mockery, a pitiful mockery of majesty—whose body had ceased to obey his will, whose tongue might not utter and whose eyelids were too flaccid to open !

He died a few minutes after midnight ; and with dawn was issued an official bulletin, impressively bordered with black. It was stated therein that His Majesty's end—at 12.7 a.m.—had been free from pain and entirely peaceful ; and from an official bulletin no other statement was to be expected—it would hardly have done to inform the public that, before he sank into complete unconsciousness, there had been signs that betokened a fearful rather than a peaceful attitude of mind. Plain signs, impossible to misinterpret . . . the man was afraid, there could be no doubt of it—clinging pitiably to the life that he knew to be slipping away from him. He who, more than once, had tarred a nation on to war—he who had looked on young men marching out to die in their thousands—he shrank from the grave now his own turn was come to go down to it. It was whispered by those who had been most about his person that there was a direct and close connection between the two facts ; they would hint that His Majesty's attitude towards his conquests had altered, very markedly, in the months since his health began to fail. The old pride in warlike achievement had dwindled and it no longer gave him pleasure to dwell on the expansion of his territory and the gallant exploits of his soldiers ; more than once, in the last few weeks of his life, there had dropped from his lips a suggestion of

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remorse for past quarrel and blood spilled. And if remorse was in his soul when he came to make his end . . .

Whatever the cause, his last conscious moments were not tranquil. They had thought him sinking, when he roused again and the terror of death was made manifest ; his eyes, no longer dull but lit with comprehension, opened suddenly and widely, seeking his last help from man. They turned, in appeal, from one to another of those who stood around his bed. From the doctor, bending over him, with a finger on a flickering pulse, to his son and successor, standing with his back to the light—uniformed, erect, and inscrutable. Then on past the other inscrutable face, of his Chancellor ; past a grey Field-Marshal, a comrade-in-arms, whose tears ran down on his triple row of ribbons ; till they sought out and rested on a Churchman. The summons—the plea—though dumb was unmistakable ; the Archbishop knelt at the dying man's bedside, bending down his ear for the message of the pale, cracked lips ; but though the cracked lips moved, the sounds that came from them were faint and wholly incomprehensible. His feet were already in the Valley of the Shadow and his power of converse with the living had been taken from him ; he may, or may not, have heard the Archbishop as he whispered the ritual prayer for a passing soul ; he may, or may not, have seen the raising of the Sign of Salvation before the light of understanding faded from his eyes and they closed. None of those who stood at his bedside,

watching, could say with certainty that comfort had been given to a soul in need of it ; for though life was in the War-Lord for an hour or two longer, he neither spoke nor gave any sign of consciousness. Till, a little after midnight, he yielded up the ghost and his son reigned in his stead.

As a matter of fact, the soul of the War-Lord had not been comforted. His last thoughts in the body were not of the Sign of Salvation and the mercy it typified—they faded swiftly from his dying comprehension, giving place to dreams of old wars. Fragmentary visions—glimpses of pain, ugliness, and cruelty. . . . The singing in his ears grew louder and louder till it sounded like bugle-notes and the clatter of hooves ; the mist before his eyes was smoke of guns, and out of it there rushed a great company of horsemen. Not gallant cavalry, riding neck to neck, but cavalry broken and in headlong flight. Terrified horses ; riders swaying drunken in their saddles ; and dead men and dying men, fallen and dragged by the stirrup. So they passed, tormented, with pursuit behind them—hacking at them, hacking at them . . . leaving him standing in a railway siding where a train was drawn up, a train of many trucks. And as he stood in the siding (he might not move from it) one after another, one after another, stretchers with bleeding and bandaged men were carried by and laid in the trucks. When he looked along the railway-track, it seemed there was no end to the train ; and when he turned the other way and looked along the road, there was no end to the

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long line of those who were bearing the wounded. Far away he could see them, a line stretching out to the horizon ; so far away were they that they seemed like ants, and one could not tell if they moved. And beyond the horizon the line must go on—there were always others coming, others coming. . . . Because he could do no other, he watched them until death veiled his sight ; they were with him almost to the moment when the doctor took his fingers from a lifeless pulse and glanced to the Prince who stood erect and inscrutable—while the Archbishop fell on his knees and prayed for that which had once been a king !

At first it was darkness, utter darkness, and the helplessness and stupor of sleep ; but, when sight and understanding came back to him, he was a ghost and aware of the fact. Some ghosts, it is said, begin their career under a misapprehension which leads to inconvenience ; unable to realise the loss of their bodies, they behave or strive to behave, as they did when encased in accustomed flesh and blood and surrounded by terrestrial solids. In this case, however, there was no such initial misconception : the very fact that he was without a companion—unwaited-on by soldier or deferential servitor—that in itself was enough to make it clear to an earthly monarch that he had opened his eyes on new and unfamiliar conditions.

Having opened them, he gazed around—and none too happily—on an insubstantial dreariness, a suggestion of pale landscape fading into vapour. There was excuse to be made for depression of

spirits ; his surroundings were by no means conducive to cheerfulness. The light that revealed them was wan and sickly—light coming from he knew not whence, since neither sun nor moon was visible. . . . This, then, he reflected, was the place of departed spirits—and the more he surveyed it, the less he was taken with the look of it. By no stretch of the imagination could he persuade himself that this monotonous atmosphere of pale uncertainties was a department of Abraham's bosom, a mansion made ready for the Blessed. And if not . . . the inference was far from encouraging ! With regret in his heart for the world he had left, the ex-monarch stared at the shifting cloud-wrack by which he was encompassed ; a lonely, bewildered, home-sick Shadow, craving yet dreading enlightenment as to his future. At one moment he desired, above all things, some sign that he was not forgotten by God and by men ; the next he trembled and shrank into himself, lest the knowledge of his fate be even more unpleasant than ignorance.

After how long he knew not, he was aware—and suddenly—that he had ceased to be alone in his world. That which he had gazed on a moment before as a passing wreath of vapour, took shape, form, and meaning—was a figure outlined against the wan pallor of the atmosphere. His first impression was of majesty only ; then hope leaped within him as he realised its attribute of graciousness. There was nothing of evil in this vision floating gently in the void ; with eyes intent on the deeps below and hands outstretched

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as if in welcome to something yet unseen in the distance. Infinitely desirous, infinitely tender was the tremor of those outstretched hands ; they were love made exquisitely manifest, drawing the well-beloved towards them.

" It must be an angel," the new-made Ghost reflected. " And if so—if so, I cannot be condemned and cast out from the company of Heaven." And, filled with relief, he drew near to the Angel and accosted it, requesting its aid, its advice and guidance for a spirit yet new to its surroundings.

" Hush ! " said the Angel, without turning his head. " Not now, little spirit. Can't you see I'm busy ? You disturb me."

His eyes, like his hands, were turned downwards, strained downwards in desire—seeing something to long for where the Ghost at his side saw only the whirling of a mist-wreath. But as his own gaze followed the gaze of the Angel, by degrees, slow degrees, the veil of mist grew thinner, more transparent ; until, near and yet distant, there smiled through it the good green earth. The good green earth as he had always known it—his heart yearned towards it from this new, strange world insubstantial ; a kindly slope of hillside, sunlit and familiar, where turf was neighboured by upstanding bracken and the purple of willow-herb and heather. That was all he noted when the earth-glimpse was first revealed to him ; until again he followed the gaze of the Angel and saw what the Angel was watching. Not the turf, the heather, or the upstanding

bracken, but a tragedy whereof it was the background !

It had been told of the Ghost, in the days of his earth-life, that he was oddly sympathetic to the life of the beast and the bird ; it was even said that he who had sent out his soldiers to battle without sign of misgiving, he who had looked upon many stricken fields, had scruples about taking the life of a deer or a partridge. Thus what he saw now he shrank from with trembling—the paralysed fear of a rabbit as a weasel, slim and graceful, danced the death-dance. Circling round on the turf, drawing nearer to the doomed ; whose wail rose pitiful and hopeless—while the weasel danced nearer, danced nearer.

“ Save it,” cried the Ghost, moved to pity for the quivering brown bunny. “ Save the little thing, oh, mighty Angel.” But for all the notice the mighty Angel took, the Ghost might as well have held his tongue. Nearer, ever nearer, slim and graceful, came the dancer—and the rabbit, its trembling ears laid back, crouched motionless and stared at the wicked little eyes and the pointed muzzle—that was doom. Even its pitiful wailing was stilled . . . and the Angel bent over and watched.

“ I can’t look,” said the Ghost, and turned away his eyes from the torment ; but the Angel—if Angel indeed he were—bent over to watch the more closely, the more clearly. If Angel he were . . . for the sight, to all appearance, gave him pleasure. His eyes were exultant as they followed the movements of the weasel round the rabbit.

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He was waiting (so it seemed), all aglow with eagerness, for the last ugly scene of the tragedy, the leap of the dancer on its prey.

Of a sudden his face was transfigured, aflame with delight ; and the Ghost, looking down, saw the dance was at end—the weasel, the drinker of blood, had its teeth in the neck of the rabbit. He shrank from the rejoicing in the face of the Angel, and filled with great horror, turned and fled.

“He’s a devil,” said the Ghost, as he fled he knew not whither, “a devil in the guise of an angel. And since that’s what he is—why, I must be in Hell after all !

When he stayed his flight from the presence of the Devil who took pleasure in torment, he stood on the edge of an expanse of water that glimmered to a misty distance ; and here for the first time he was aware of the presence of his kind. Other souls disembodied were gathering by the water ; vague, bewildered shadows, as helpless as himself, who drifted to the shore and there waited for what might befall them.

While they waited and wondered through the cloud-wrack, on the water came a boat, whose oars touched the surface without splash or ripple and which grated on the beach without sound. As it neared the landing-place the new-made ghost was drawn all unwillingly towards it ; and, strive as he might against the force that drew him, his footsteps made for the beach. Will he or nill he, he must cross the pale expanse of water ; but all his being was a-shudder, with the fear of what

might lie before him. The shadowy boat with the soundless oars—no need to tell him it was plying to the place where he must give an account of his stewardship.

He was not the only passenger summoned to the place of judgment; the keel of the boat had hardly touched the shore when vague bewildered shadows crowded into it from all sides. Many, like himself, were trembling for the future, afraid with a fear that could be felt; but there were others more tranquil who, rightly or wrongly, were confident of mercy or reward. One such was the Shade of a woman whose face in the earth-life had been worn, but which, now that the bitterness of death had past, was radiant with hope and content. As the silent oars drew the boat from the shore, the Shade who had been King looked with envy at the Shade of the woman; he wondered at her confidence, wondered at her calm—and even as he wondered, she turned and her eyes met his.

“You!” she cried. “You—who were the King!”

Her face, lined and elderly, was utterly unknown to him—he had brought no memory of it from his life on earth. In the circumstances, however, his ignorance was hardly surprising; the shadow of a shawl that enwrapped the shoulders of his travelling companion was of a pattern and texture that suggested anything but affluence. In the flesh, presumably, she had belonged to the class which was wont to crowd the pavement and wave its greetings when the sovereign rode in state

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through the streets ; but whose breeding and resources would hardly entitle it to a nearer acquaintance with his person. From force of long habit he was about to acknowledge her recognition with a condescending bow when she checked him with something like a laugh.

“ So it's your day of reckoning as well as mine ! Your time has come to answer—I thank God ! ”

He stared at her, astounded by the change in a face that had been gentle ; realising that the finger she pointed at him trembled with scorn and that there was no disguise about the exultant hatred in her eyes.

“ Who were you ? ” he stammered. “ Who were you ? . . . and why ? . . . ”

“ Who was I ? ” she mocked back at him. “ Just one of your subjects, your very humble subjects. That is all you need to know, my most sovereign Lord ; if I told you my name, what would it mean to you ?—nothing. I was one of the people, the people you were called to rule over ; one of your millions, a woman born to work with her hands. But if I was of little account in your sight, you were not too proud, my sovereign Lord, to accept a gift from my humbleness. And not one gift, but three—the best I could give you—my straight, fine boys were my all ! Three sons I bore and three sons I reared to manhood, that you might take them for yours and send them out to win you your victories. And not one of them came back from the winning of your victories—not one of them. You took them for

your men—the youngest was a child—and they died for you. That you might be glorious and add lands to your kingdom, my house was left empty—all my years my house was left empty. You ”—again her finger scorned him—“ you had your reward. The renown of your conquests and the trembling of your enemies. And the crowds that shouted and threw up their caps when you came back in triumph from the wars. But I—I had three dead sons.”

She waited—but the Ghost of the War-Lord made no answer ; he stood dumb and defenceless before her. It was not alone the mother of three dead sons who gibed at him ; behind her, and echoing her every word of scorn, was an accuser more dreadful, his own soul. This, in his last ailing months of life, had been his unconfessed dread, the horror of his nightly wakefulness ; this meeting, when death should have reft him of his lordship, with those who had paid the price of victory. Now, at long last, he was faced with his dread, his secret horror ; this woman was of those who had paid.

“ I rejoice,” she cried exultantly, “ I rejoice in this day, because in it I am blest and doubly blest. This day my long loneliness is ended and my sons will be born to me again ; and this day, if there is justice in God and His Heaven, you who robbed me of my children will stand before the judgment-seat and answer for that you have done. For the blood of which you have been guilty, for the hearts you have made barren and the homes you have made desolate. And such mercy, Oh

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War-Lord, as you showed to us in life, that surely will be meted out to you ! ”

Once again he was silent, finding no answer ; for to every bitter word, as it came from her lips, his own soul had cried its “ Amen.” He might not even lift his thought in a prayer for mercy ; his sin, so it seemed to him, was beyond all hope of forgiveness. Thousands on thousands of young men dying before their time had, in years past, accused him at the judgment-seat of Heaven. And how should he face them, cut off at his bidding ? how answer to them for their lives ?

“ Look,” said the Shadow of the Woman in his ear, “ we are nearing the shore and they are ready and waiting for you—look ! ”

He would have hidden his eyes from the sight, but they would not be hidden ; at her whisper he rose from his crouching and followed her finger to the distance. At first it was only the line of the shore he could distinguish ; a long, low shore where a glory, as of sunlight, was driving back the mist from the waters ; but, as the boat glided onwards and the light grew clearer, it was plain to be seen there were men on the shore, in their thousands. Men standing motionless and shoulder to shoulder ; rank on serried rank of them . . . an army ! . . . And, at sight of that army, the man who had been king cried out unto God, like the first of all murderers, that his punishment was more than he could bear. For the ranks on serried ranks that stretched away to distance were clad in the old familiar uniforms of the soldiers he had known in his lifetime ; the garb of those who had

followed and died for him and the garb of those who had followed and died for his enemies. In the Land of the Shadows their blood-feud was forgotten and they stood side by side, without difference; dead man by dead man, standing at attention, and rigid in their soldierly silence. The slain, in their thousands and their tens of thousands, were awaiting the coming of the War-Lord.

"Oh, my sons," cried the woman, as the boat touched the shore. "Oh, my children given back to me—my sons!"

The War-Lord did not hear her; he had fallen on his knees before the slain. That he might not see them he covered his eyes and prayed dumbly: "If there were but death! Not this mockery of ending where the soul lives on, but a death that is silence and forgetfulness!"

But as he cowered and prayed for the peace of forgetfulness, voices, many voices, called him kindly welcome, and hands were stretched out to lift him from his shame upon the ground. The hands of ghostly soldiers, extended in friendliness; and the faces that smiled at him were those of dead young men who still wore a semblance of his uniform, the uniform in which they had fallen. "Of a surety," he told himself, "these men do not know who I am"; and, the old, royal habit of command remembered, he ordered them—as once he had ordered them in life—"Stand back!"

"Stand back," the Shadow of the Woman echoed him. "Is he so changed since you left the earth that you do not know who it is? The War-Lord, the first-born of Cain, the Arch-

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Murderer ! . . . Oh, you, my youngest"—her arms were round the neck of a Shadow—"oh, you, my darling, you were still but a child when he killed you !"

The Shadow of the Boy shook his head and laughed at her tenderly. "And for that," he said, "I thank him, Mother mine. I thank him."

"You thank him?" cried the woman. "The shedder of your blood?" And the Boy-Ghost nodded: "This is Paradise."

And all along the ranks of the Army of the Dead there rolled a laughing echo: "This is Paradise!"

The Woman stared, bewildered, from one smiling face to another.

"What do you mean, Son?" she stammered at last. "This is Paradise, you tell me, but what of that? What has it to do with the guilt of a maker of wars?"

"Paradise," the Boy-Ghost repeated, "the place where it is good to be . . . where the pains of the body are over and done with, and likewise the troubles of the soul. Where there is nothing any longer for man or beast to fear—neither sickness nor hunger, neither madness nor strife, neither poverty nor feebleness of age. We, whom you see, were taken from these griefs in our youth and strength; the years that others suffered in the world below, we, who died young, have been spared. And would you have us turn, ungrateful, on him who released us so early? . . . Here in our happiness it is the living, not the dying, that we pity, Mother mine. When you have been with us

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a little while you, too, will know that the greatest blessing we can wish to man or beast is death."

And all along the ranks of the Army of the Dead, there rolled another echo of assent.

(The War-Lord, his head going round with amazement, had, so far, said never a word; but he remembered, in the light of a new understanding, the Angel looking down on the weasel and its prey; the Angel he had taken for a devil in disguise because it rejoiced over death!)

"But," he stammered at last, "you're being too kind to me—I'm afraid I didn't mean to do good. If I've been of any use to you, it was only by accident . . ."

"Very likely," said the Dead. "A great many virtues are like that."

So they took the ex-War-Lord and showed him the way about Paradise—he protesting that he was not worthy. Whereupon they explained to him that very few were worthy, but he had done them a good turn, if only by accident, and therefore they were glad to have him with them. Only the Woman-Ghost, his fellow-traveller, was at first resentful of his kindly reception by the Shadows; she admitted—the fact could not well be gainsaid—that it was very much better to be dead than alive—but all the same . . .

"He has sinned," she grumbled, "he has greatly sinned."

"Well, so have we all," said the Dead.

"*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore:*" said Mr. Butterworth.

THE PRIEST'S TALE

"Just like that," said the Schoolmarm, who knew her Æneid.

"Death's terrors . . ." began Mr. Turpin.

"Depend upon the manner of his coming," interrupted Vivian Spencer, "as you shall judge when I have told you

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE BUREAUCRAT

THE BUREAUCRAT'S TALE

CUPBOARD LOVE

By MICHAEL SADLEIR

I HAD an uncle (he is dead now, dear man, and enjoying whatsoever reward hereafter may await a sturdy honesty of mind) in whom I felt, as a youth, that instinctive confidence which certain older persons can inspire in juniors of their own sex. I do not mean that I was in the habit of discussing serious subjects with him more readily than with any other of my relatives (indeed, like most young Englishmen, I had a horror of all serious discussion and tended the more to flippancy the more I felt the burdensome absurdity of life), but that he stood in my mind for candour and good sense, so that, almost unconsciously, I tended to deport myself and to judge other people according to the standards which I believed to be his. He, for his part, was undemonstratively kind to me, welcomed me to his London house, and was always ready with that quiet hospitality,—three parts sympathy and only one part ostentation—which is (whatever pessimists may say as to the luxury-desires of youth) the hospitality most agreeable to an ordinary young man.

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Physically my uncle was tall and broad, but he was strangely pale of complexion and—already, at the age of forty-five—had snow-white hair. This curious blend of facial pallor, white hair, and robust active body made him a noticeable figure wherever he went, and I can remember noting, almost the first time that I walked with him along the streets, that folk turned and looked after him with the instinctive wonder of persons aware of strangeness but as yet uncertain of its source. He would talk freely of his life, but I do not recall that he ever referred to his personal appearance until the evening upon which he told me the story that I am now free to repeat.

We were in his study after dinner, and I was wandering restlessly about the room, picking up books and putting them down again, kicking an unoffending footstool, smoking too many cigarettes, and generally behaving in the wayward and irritating fashion of one who wants something that he has not, but is uncertain what it may be or how obtainable. The night beyond the uncurtained window was soft and velvet dark—one of those nights that fall on London now and then in February, and, by their very contrast to the windy showers that have been and will be again, bring thoughts of spring more poignant than young blood can tranquilly endure.

My uncle, lying back in his chair and drawing contentedly at a cigar, watched me in silence. Then suddenly: "A bit restive, eh? It's the weather. You want to be out, looking for trouble. Don't you now?"

"Trouble?" I queried. "No—o, not trouble exactly. In fact, I don't know what I do want. Just something to happen. Perhaps I will go out—just rot about a bit and see what's doing. Shall I?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear boy," he said with a smile, "I can't decide that sort of thing for you. But I can recommend you not to."

"Why 'not to'?"

"Because I shan't come with you, and alone, in your present mood, you'll make a fool of yourself. More than a fool perhaps. . . ."

I daresay I jerked my chin at the affront to my so adult dignity. He smiled again.

"No offence. But that's what's the trouble with you, and quite natural too. Unfortunately I can't fix matters for you at this moment's notice, and, I repeat, left to yourself you'll at best achieve nothing and at worst too much." After a pause he added: "If you sit down I'll tell you a story that I have never told anyone yet. It has a bearing . . . as you'll see. Among other things, it explains why I am the funny-looking object that I am. I wouldn't like you to go that way, boy; or anywhere near it."

Something in his voice caught at my attention and drowned ill-humour in curiosity. The idea of sharing with him a secret (and, if I took his meaning aright, a sensational secret) was irresistible. I plumped into a chair.

"All right," I said; "fire ahead."

With but a moment's pause he began the

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narrative which follows. During its recital I never spoke a word and hardly moved. His quiet voice fell like a transparent sheet of glass between the shadowy silence of the room (there was no other sound save the occasional subsidence of the red coals in the fire) and the murmurous bulk of night-London, over there beyond the window-panes. A sort of enchantment lay upon me, so that my imagination ranged far and perilously, but I myself remained a captive and secure. In spirit I was beside my uncle throughout his terrible adventure; in body I sat on (and consciously) beside the fender of the snug book-lined room and, most appreciatively, knew myself for safe.

I wish I could hope to recreate the atmosphere of that unforgettable evening. But it was blended of so many moods and of such a variety of transient circumstance that even to attempt it would be folly. I can only tell the tale as nearly as maybe in my uncle's words, and ask you to imagine the effect it had upon an adolescent in a state of hazy lechery, who sat beside a dying fire and watched a beloved uncle's white hair and pallid face, and came to understanding both of the whiteness and the pallor. . . .

"It was a few weeks after my twenty-first birthday," he said, "that I and a party of Oxford friends met at Romano's for dinner on Boat Race night. I believe the incidents of that annual festivity are much less lurid nowadays than they were then; certainly I never see in the papers next morning anything beyond a few trifling

summonses for disorder. But when I was your age the rowdiness and folly went to wild and often mischievous extremes. It was the convention, on that one night of the year, to behave as our kind of person has normally a horror of behaving; and for undergraduates to congregate in town for dinner and the evening was tantamount to an expressed determination to be as destructive and noisy as they dared and to drink as much of as many different sorts of liquor as they could afford. It happened that our particular party was high in funds; my 'twenty-first' had left me momentarily flush, and to Romano's I came with thirty pounds and more jingling in my pocket. Wherefore, on this particular Boat Race night, we six were out for trouble and well-equipped for finding it. We were all strong athletic fellows, with more muscle than brain, and a veneer of extreme worldliness covered—as is usual with very young men—an utter lack of practical experience. We dined well and riotously (there were several similar parties in the restaurant), and at about ten o'clock departed for the Empire, piled all over a hansom cab and singing lustily. Already when we arrived the theatre was pandemonium. We were sober enough to simulate self-control while passing the box office and the janitors, but, once admitted to the famous promenade, we set ourselves to swell the rising tumult of the scene. Someone had smuggled an air-pistol into one of the boxes and had begun taking shots at the great lustre chandelier that hung from the roof of the auditorium. Suddenly

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a glass lustre fell into the stalls, whereupon everybody within reach scrambled for the booty, and I heard the wrenching and cracking of seats that told of damage done to more than silk hats and scarves and overcoats.

"Clambering on to the partition between the promenade and the seats of the circle, I swung myself along to a place whence I could see down on to the floor of the house. Hardly had I reached this point of vantage when some idiot, having successfully secured the coveted fragment from the chandelier, flung it with all his drunken force at the stage. It hit a chorus girl in the face ; there was a shrill scream and the orchestra stuttered into silence. I saw the gaudy crowd of players flock anxiously about the damaged girl and then the curtain rattled down.

"As it fell there surged into the stalls an army of chuckers-out and, following them, the blue coats of police. I was sober enough to realise that the time had come for quick, discretionary flight. Under such provocation the police and management would implicate everyone in the house whom they could catch. The theatre was familiar to me, and I remembered that a small staircase led from the promenade to the upper circle and thence to the gallery ; from the gallery a steep series of rather dirty stone steps led downward to a side street. In a flash I was running up, dodging the excited crowd, intent only on immediate escape. I found the staircase from the gallery already crowded with nervous and excited folk who, having come out to see the young swells on the

razzle-dazzle, had seen more than enough and only wished to be at home again. I drew my coat over my evening clothes, quietly dropped my already damaged hat in a corner and joined the jostling throng. In a few minutes I was in the street and—so far as the row in the theatre was concerned—out of the way of danger.

“But then a strange thing happened. By a queer revulsion of feeling I became suddenly inflamed to think that my evening’s dissipation had been brought thus rudely to an end. Here was I, before eleven o’clock, a solitary fugitive from the hallowed scene of Boat Race revels and all through no fault of my own. The fumes of wine were still sufficiently busy in my brain to make me conscious of a need for further alcohol ; not far away the lights of a public-house flared tauntingly. I pushed into the saloon-bar and ordered brandy. Someone made a remark about the race, and we all fell into discussion of the afternoon’s events. I stood drinks round ; then further drinks, pulling a handful of sovereigns from my pocket with silly disregard of watching eyes. The garish room began to glitter more brightly than ever and to sway before my eyes. More and more I realised that the crowd of my fellow-drinkers were all jolly good sorts. I could not understand why I had never met them before. I must see lots more of them in future. And that was an uncommonly good-looking girl, there in the corner. Must go and speak to her, ask her to have a drink. Awfully jolly of her to be so polite ; some girls might have been stuffy

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—spoken to like that by a perfect stranger. Not a bit stuffy ; jolly as anything. And a pretty girl too—as pretty a girl as ever I saw. . . .

“You can, perhaps, understand that, some little while later, it became the most natural thing in the world for me to leave the bar in company with this agreeable and attractive wench ; that it was equally normal for us to find an empty hansom and, side by side, to drive briskly southward in the direction of the river. What nonsense I actually said to the girl I cannot recall ; but I know that conversation seemed delightfully easy, and I believe I asked her to come to Oxford in June for the Commemoration festivities. I remember, too, that the cab was passing over Waterloo Bridge when I had the sudden inspiration to ask, with the utmost formality, whether I might kiss her. The extreme complacency, not to say voracity, of her agreement surprised me just a little, but I told myself gravely that this was probably love at first sight for both of us and that, after all, youth must be served.

“The cab rattled down the slope of Waterloo Road, turned to the left, then to the right, and stopped abruptly. The driver called through the trap that he had another engagement to fill and we could get out here. This seemed a strange way for a cab-driver to behave, but my companion climbed calmly down on to the pavement and I followed, feeling that what was good enough for her was also good enough for me. For a moment after the hansom had wheeled round and clattered out of sight, we stood in the dark

street and kept an awkward silence. The place was absolutely deserted. A forlorn gas-lamp at the corner threw an uncertain light on the dirty pavement and on the paintless railings and soiled brickwork of a terrace of dark and towering houses. I believe I was about to wonder where precisely we were and what I was doing there, when the girl slipped her arm into mine, pressed her head against my shoulder, and murmured that we had not far to go. She began immediately to move down the murky cañon of the street and, still feebly acquiescent with the spirits I had drunk, I let slip my returning sanity and walked contentedly beside her.

"You know, I daresay, that in those days the whole region about Waterloo station—the area that lay between the New Cut and the river—was a labyrinth of narrow streets and courts, where crazy houses leant one against another for support, and where, in the obscurity of crumbling rookeries, every kind of night bird had its haunt. I am told that they have cleared the district now, that even Stamford Street itself is built of factories and warehouses. I hope so, but I have never been to look and never shall. My one experience of the place was quite enough for me.

"Picture me, then, with the unreflective docility of semi-intoxication, led by a common prostitute into the heart of this sinister and infamous region. Round corners and through narrow alley-ways we went, all the time between black cliffs of houses, until we came at last to a short flight of steps up which my companion led the way. When she

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opened the door at the top of the steps, I saw that there was light within. An unshaded gas-bracket burnt in a narrow hall, from which stairs laid with a worn oil-cloth rose into darkness. The girl laid her finger on her lips, closed the door quietly and, beckoning to me to follow, began to tiptoe up the stairs. The suggestion of conspiracy (if it was intentional it showed devilish ingenuity) cheated me of my last chance of exercising common sense. It set me, as it were, on the side of the girl against some unknown enemy; I felt that she and I were jointly vowed to snatch our young romance from disapproving age, that when she called to me for help, it was my pride and privilege to answer.

"Thus fatuously deluded, I crept behind her up the dark steep stairs. The house smelt sour and horribly unclean. We passed closed, silent doors and, at each landing, a narrow window through which seemed to scowl in at us a darkness blacker even than that which lurked unhealthily in the landing corners. Up and up we went, the girl striking an occasional match, until at a door facing the stairhead on I know not what floor she stopped, and fumbled in her pocket for a key. We entered the room; she struck another match and lit an oil lamp with a paintless tin shade that stood upon a little table. In the strengthening light I looked about me. The room was square and rather low. A double-bed stood in one corner; beside it a plain chair. The mantelshelf was covered with a faded flounce of red cloth edged with dangling balls of wool.

Over it was a mirror in a tarnished and ornate gilt frame, while a few trifling ornaments were disposed about the shelf to hide its nakedness. On one side of the fireplace, giving access presumably to cupboards in the wall, were two doors. The single window was covered by a dampstained blind. There was a square of carpet on the floor ; the dressing-table carried a few pieces of cheap toilet-ware and a hairbrush, and the common washstand a jug and basin of different and unharmonious design ; in the centre of the room stood a small three-legged table upon which the lamp was placed. I heard the door by which we had entered click behind me, and the next moment the girl came close to me, threw her arms about my neck and pressed her lips greedily to mine.

“ I will spare you a detailed description of the next few minutes of this bestial idiocy. As we sat side by side upon the bed and made preliminary love, she explained that the landlady of this house was strict in respect to the character of her lodgers ; that if a young woman having rooms beneath this roof were known to have admitted a man at night time, that young woman would be turned into the street ; that I must be very quiet, and should then have such a reward as was not always given to good boys, even though they deserved it as thoroughly as I would surely do. A few more kisses, followed by a quick suggestion of intimacies yet to come, and she got up and stood before me.

“ ‘ You get ready,’ she said, ‘ and pop into bed. I’ll be back in five minutes.’ ”

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"Then she opened one of the doors beside the fireplace, passed through, and I was left alone.

"I had passed the peak of my intoxication and had reached that first stage on the downward slope to sobriety, when the sufferer is fully conscious of his position and of the follies (if any) which have brought him there, but accepts existing circumstances without rancour and without vain regrets. I now realised that, during a brief period of suspended intelligence, I had been picked up by a woman of the town and was sitting in her bedroom awaiting the fulfilment of a tacit contract. Beyond a slight shame for my own feeble-mindedness I felt no strong distaste for the situation. As such girls went, she seemed a decent sort enough ; I had money in my pocket and fully my share of a young man's readiness for love-making ; also the spirits I had drunk still buoyed me up. So, with a pleasant if controlled complacency, I removed my coat and waistcoat, took off my shoes and lounged back on the bed to await my partner's return.

"The house was profoundly silent ; the more so in contrast to the growing clamour of the weather without. I heard in the chimney the murmur of a rising wind and the dash of heavy drops on the window-pane. It had been a rough and threatening afternoon, had cleared at twilight to a windy freshness, and later clouded again. Nothing more likely than that the night should set in wet and wild. Presumably the thought of storm without set me observing once again the

room in which I had at least a shelter from the rain. As I surveyed its threadbare furnishings I thought the light seemed dimmer than before. Surely, when first I had looked at the mantelshelf and at the mirror above it, the tawdry details had been clearer to see, less shrouded in uncertain gloom than now they were? I went to examine the lamp. The wick was high enough, but the flame oddly small. I lifted the lamp in my hand and shook it gently. The oil was nearly gone; I could hear the small remains of it awash within the tank. No wonder the place was darker. The lamp was slowly going out.

"But I still remained unperturbed. The girl would be back in a minute. She would have more oil in readiness or at least candles. Once again I lay back on the bed, drowsily expectant.

"The minutes passed. The rain drummed steadily beyond the faded blind; now and again drops fell with a sharp patter into the empty grate, proving that I was, if not on the top floor of this gaunt house, at least not far below the chimney-pots. The lamp sank lower still.

"Then quite suddenly I had a spasm of fear. I sat up and an uneasy shiver ran chilly down my spine. A throng of questions invaded my mind. Where was this room? Was the silence a real silence or the menacing artificial quiet of something—somebody—keeping deliberately still? Why did the girl not return? Was it ten minutes since she went away? Fifteen?

"I was on my feet now, listening desperately but hearing only the beating of my own heart,

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the gusty clamour of the rain and the wailing of the night wind in the chimney. For a few seconds I felt the grip of a wild panic at my heart. The fit shook me and passed, leaving me breathless and trembling. Clumsily I sought to turn the wick of the dying lamp still higher in its socket. There was a momentary strengthening of the light, even a brief period of steadiness, before it once more began to sink. I took a firm hold on my nerves. Successive shocks of fear had chilled the warm confidence of alcohol to an extreme of bleak fatigue. Sweat lay cold on my hands and forehead ; I felt tired and headachy, but the return of sobriety meant also a return of self-respect. I had gone far enough in degradation ; I was determined not to go further still and add hysteria to drunken folly.

“Without waiting to pull on coat or overcoat and, still of a purpose, in stockinged feet, I crept to the door by which I had entered, intending to open it softly and listen for any sound of movement in the house below. But the handle turned foolishly in my grasp ; it was a mere knob for pulling and worked no latch. As strongly as I dared I pulled ; then pushed. Useless ; the door was tightly shut.

“The flame of the lamp began to wink and leap. At this final threat of a now inevitable darkness I came to bitter understanding of my grave predicament. What would happen—rather what might not happen—when the lamp died utterly ? The problem had in a flash become one of immediate escape. I had no longer any doubt of

being in a trap, and instinct whispered that it was a trap indeed.

“Remembering that the girl—how many hours ago it seemed since she was there!—had left the room by one of the doors beside the fireplace, I blundered, half crazy with fear, toward this new chance of escape. To my joy the handle that I grasped turned readily and the door opened. I found myself peering into a shallow wall cupboard, along the back of which was fixed an ordinary row of hooks for hanging clothes. But, as my eyes in the uncertain now frantically leaping light moved from one end of the cupboard to the other, they fell on something that turned every drop of blood within me to liquid terror. From a hook in the extreme corner of the cupboard, its swollen head lolling forward from the cord that hitched it to the wall, hung the dead body of a naked man. I saw the ugly greenish drab of the flesh ; I saw in the last upward flicker of the dying light a limp arm tattooed with letters half-an-inch high : “DELIVER US FROM EVIL” ; and then, as the lamp plunged into darkness, went staggering back against the dressing-table, a soundless scream of horror on my lips, my reeling brain a hell of frightful, gibbering fears. . . .”

For quite three minutes after my uncle ceased to speak, I sat paralysed with the horror of his tale. Then gradually the ticking of the clock forced its way into my petrified absorption ; gradually the familiar objects of the comfortable room

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crept into recognition. With a great effort I moved my hand, then turned my head ever so slightly to the right and left. At last in a strangled whisper :

" And then ? " I said.

There was a sharp flick as the stub of his cigar struck against the bar of the grate and fell rustling into the ash-strewn fender.

" Honestly, Jack, I don't know. All that I can remember is that I fled in crazy terror down a strange passage through a lumber-room beneath an attic-roof ; down a pitch-dark well of stairs, and so, by some means or another, out of that murderous slum. I suppose I tried the second door (by which the girl had in the first instance left the room), found it open, and so got into another house.

" Two workmen found me at dawn next morning, crying in a street a quarter of a mile away. I was on my back for six weeks. When I got about again my hair and face were as you see them now."

He fell silent once more. After a few moments he stood up, and in an altered voice :

" Well, shall we take a stroll ? "

Frankly, as we went along, I clung quite unashamedly to his arm, and every time we passed a girl alone or even two girls chattering in company, I dropped my eyes and walked the faster. . . .

" Phew ! " from Valentine Herrick.

" Exactly," quoth the Lady of Fashion.

MICHAEL SADLEIR

Said Mr. Turpin, "I am reminded of an experience . . ."

"Oh, please," from a protesting Miss Pogson.

"I have a story," said Peter Brown. "It is in dialect. I rather fancy myself at dialect. We will call it

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE
DETECTIVE'S FRIEND

THE TALE OF THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND

DARBY DALLOW TELLS HIS TALE

By A. E. COPPARD

MY father died when he was sixty-seven—not too old, ye know—and he left me a hundred pounds. He was much respected always. There warn't a bad thing said about him, and nobody found fault. He'd a good character. He was a country labourer and I'm a country labourer, and if they say as much for me I'll be content. His character was good. Coorse, he'd been a widower for years, thirty years or more. I left home as soon as I growed up, and he lived by himself, same as I did, though he was very fond of me. Father liked that sort of life and so do I, it suits me. I was fond of him, too, in a way. I was the apple of his eye. When I was born they says I'd a head like a apple—and I dunno as 'tis changed much since. He was a shy man, and I'm not fond of gadding.

We kept his corpse for three days and then we

buried him. There warn't nobody else to mourn him, so I was the only mourner, and when I got back to the house again—the house I'd been born in—I'd forgotten my way about the rooms, I'd been so long away. But I had some queer sort of wine and some cake with spice in it, and after that I learnt my father had left me a hundred pounds. Of money. There was a great brightness on the land at sunset that day; a sharpish April day it was, and it showne so much as I'd never seen afore hardly, the shadows so long and so clear. And I had the hundred pounds and I come away.

It took years to spend all that money. I began to forget my father, and I quite forgot my kindred—they're dead now. I liked a glass of beer and a how-dye-do? but I was never a one for much friendship; but I never forgot the brightness that lay on the land the day my father was put into the earth. He was always a little man, shortish and light, same as me, but on the coffin plate they had engraved his name very bold and large—so as not to forget, I suppose. George Grimes Dallow, it was, and if you was to ask me what the Grimes stood for I couldn't tell you. But that brightness of that sunset seemed like a fire that was to burn up all memory of a person dead. And so it did. People forgot my father, they all forgot him, tho' he'd a good character and was much respected; and when I spent the last of the hundred pounds I forgot what he had looked like even. He was gone out of time and mind, might never have been born at all. He left that hundred

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pounds to keep his memory green for me, and so long as the money lasted I kept a hold on him. But the money's gone and he's gone, too. Nothing. If I dug out his grave I'd find only a few bones, maybe. The flesh gone, years, long ago. His ears would have fallen off and his tongue dried like a walnut. If his hair continued to grow, as they say it does for a while, 'twould be all matted like pond-weed. He was buried with his old watch laid on his heart—well, not his old watch really, for that was gold, a rare old-fashioned family timepiece ; so I kept it for myself, and bought a second-hand keyless, one of these foreigners, for that purpose. He wanted to be buried with his watch—I dunno for why, time's no use in the grave. I heard it rattle off his heart when the coffin slid down below. I wonder what's become of it now ? Rusty, I'spect. Och, St. Mary save us !

I spent the last of the hundred pounds after I'd married my wife Sophy and give up living alone. Now she's dead too, and I'm alone once more. I was fifty year old when she died—that was four year ago. Four years all but two weeks and I aint forgotten her yet. Well, that's nature. It don't seem long sometimes, but others it's like a lifetime. Marriage didn't suit her, she was always a sick woman one way or another, always, I dunno for why. We don't know everything by a long ways, and we can't guess much. She was sick right from the start of our marriage, and the money was soon gone. Sixteen months she lay on her back and it was grieving to hear her 'oller at nights. At last the doctor came

and give her sommat, and she couldn't get out of bed—she fell out. Yes, and that cured her for the time being !

I'd rather be at work than abed, any road. I had two days once, along o' my back (it ketched me theer) and I sweat like a baker. But when I heard Henry go by in the road with the horses, that urged me dreadful ! I says :

“ Sophy, I be goooing to get up.”

She says : “ You bain't ! ”

I says : “ I 'ool,” and I did too and all.

I was very fond of her, and of course it was bad luck on us ; as fond as a man could be, but—I dunno about her. It was the illness, I suppose. A timid woman she was, always seeing ghosts and that sort of canter, as if she had sommat on her mind ; but what it was I could never fathom. Some said one thing, and some said another, there's no end to tittle-tattle. It's been said mor'n once—not in my hearing, though !—that Henry Ulledge was her fancy man. He's said so hisself—not in my hearing, though !—but if a man's a born liar, what are ye to do with him ? No, there was nothing in that, I knows, I knows. They did keep company once, afore I came on the scene ; for years they kept company, but they had a flare-up. Any road, she took me, and she was my faithful wife, that I can swear. At least, as far as I knows. Of course—well, there you are.

Some people don't believe in ghosts, but, of course, I do. Mind you, I never seen one, but there's Lord Contillon who was buried over fifty

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years ago—his ghost walked. He was a queer old gentleman, and he left word as how he was to be buried in his bath-house, a little stone shanty down near the river. And his ghost walked so much that it frightened all the people out of their wits and so there had to be what is called a re-lay. And a terrible business that was: twelve clergymen, ye know, and all had to say the Lord's prayer back'ards and burn a hell of a lot of candles. But I bain't much afraid of ghosts. I been out all hours of the night round here—eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock,—in the woods or the medders, and I was never fixed with a fear. What's the good on it? You do no hurt to nothing, and nothing's good safety. If you hurt nothing, nothing won't hurt you. Never. And I can take my oath—this is solemn truth as I be going to tell 'ee—I was out in Potter's Lease pretty late one night—well, 'twas midnight then, for I heard the parish clock as near as next door, you might say, and I said to myself: "That's give a damn good strike to-night." 'Twas dark, o'coorse, and then I see'd a lump of something laying down on the path. "Well," I says to myself, "whatever can that be?" But I didn't stop, not just there, I walked on. I walked on a little ways, for I hadn't got a stick nor nothing. "Whatever can that be?" I says. So I crope back to it and give it a bit of a stir with my foot. Well, do you know, that was a woman, laying out rough. I had a good look round and I listened, but there warn't another soul about, 'cept myself, so I kneels down and puts my arms round her

—to pick her up, you see. God Almighty, she *was* drunk! I picked her up and got her out on to the road, and there she calls me every evil thing she could lay her tongue to, everything. O lord! She thought I wanted to—you know—to interfere with her. O' coorse she was drunk. I didn' know what to be at, and I left her be; just there. • I did'n know what was before me or what was behind me—a woman like that! So what d'ye think I did? I'll tell you. I took all the money out of my pockets and put it in the soles of my boots, and I walked off home thataways. You never can tell, ye know. A woman like that! Drunk. I walked all the way home with my money in the bottom of my boots. Ha, ha. That done 'em! That done 'em! I never saw anything more of her. She thought I wanted to interfere with her, I suppose. That's what it was, but o' coorse . . .

No, I never see'd a ghost, but Sophy was always a seeing of 'em, and she had dropsy too. This Henry Ulledge used to pray for her in the chapel, but he and I couldn't get on with one another. I dunno for why, but us couldn'. He was a gospel chap, too, and used to preach in the chapel sometimes. Very well-to-do family; his father was a flower cultivator and kept a bakery, but the son was a plumber and painter. And he used to preach in the chapel, but for some reason—I can't tell for why—I couldn't abide the chap. You know, I could not like him, this Henry Ulledge, not if you was to give me forty shillings straight into my hand this very minute. Very

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fond of gardening he was, and a good gardener, too. Once he growed a row of beans against another chap in one of these old-fashioned competitions. I like beans myself, I'm fond of 'em, I love 'em, I could eat beans in the middle of the night. But just when these were about ripe some chaps broke in and stole the whole darn lot of 'em clean out of his garden and 'out of the other chap's garden, the whole darn lot of 'em. The next Sunday Henry got up in the pulpit and began to preach his sermon. He could preach, too, when he was aminded, Henry Ulledge could—hot and strong, ye know, for them as liked it.

"Woe to the Scribes and the Pharisees," he says. "Woe to 'em! They shall no more enter the kingdom of glory," he says. "And woe to them rascals as stole Henry Ulledge and Master Nicholls's beans! They shall no more enter the kingdom of heaven than a cow shall climb up a tree back'ards and calve in a rook's nest!" A regular dandyish man, always had a umbrella for Sundays; but, you understand my meaning, there was no love lost between me and Henry Ulledge.

What there was between him and Sophy I can't say for certain, but when her was dead he came along and was agoing to follow the funeral. O' coorse, I couldn' have that caper.

"You cut out of here," I says. "I don't want you, and she don't want you. This is my private grief," I told him. But he didn't go away, not far. Had his umbrella with him, too.

Hung about the churchyard till all was over, and I heard tell afterwards as he chucked a bunch of flowers down the grave. Had I known of it I'd a fetched 'em out of that. I would !

It was dropsy carried her off. She was younger than me by a good bit, and taller too. And that dropsy, or whatever 'twas, made her ill for years, you could say she was always ill. For the last eight weeks of her life I can take my oath I never had my clothes off ; I just laid down beside her at nights and I got up the same in the mornings. I changed the bandages on her legs every night. Coorse, I was told to burn the old bandages, but a coorse I couldn' afford that, so I used to wash 'em myself. At other times, whenever she were extra bad, I'd stay at home and it was—well, I tell you, I wouldn' be a woman for all the men ever born. They say a woman's work is never done, and that's gospel—or I don't know what is. Look, I'd get up a mornings and light the fire. Then I'd turn to and there's the breakfast to be got and nothing to get it with, and arterwards I'd wash up the dirty plates and cups. When I turned round again the fire 'ud be out. So I'd chop up a few sticks and light it again, and then I would go and do a spell in the garden, and so help me, before I could think twice there was the dinner to be got, and when I goes for to boil him—the fire be out. I'm no fidgit, but whenever I goood out to do some simple thing and I come back, damn me, the fire was always out. And she, poor woman, she couldn't help it, but I could do nothing right for her ; the tea

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was too hot, or the bread was too hard, or the floor was dusty—O, she was a Tartar on her back. The doctor came one day, it was one of her very bad days, I'll own, and he says to her: "Mrs. Dallow, you be a hearty woman!" My wife was a bit hard of hearing—though it wasn't any detriment to her. She was a fine proper creature otherwise—hard of hearing, so she says "What?" He shouts in her ear: "You're good for another ten years." And I thought to myself—it was one of her very bad days, I'll own—"Doctor, for God's sake don't say that!"

I was fond of her, ye know, there was nothing I wouldn't have done to help her, poor soul, but that's how it was. Coorse, you can't be disponsible for anything you says and only half of what you does. Life's like that, and I'm not ashamed.

She was in the hospital a month and got better, but when she came away she didn't stay better, she took worse, and so she went to stay with her sister for a fortnight. She only bore one child, poor woman, and that died in a week. A boy, it was, a fine little chap with a head like a apple. If he'd have lived he'd have fought in this last war. Never bore any other children. There were evil people who said I did give her pills, so's she shouldn'—if you ever heard of such a thing! Pills that split in two, one half to go one way and one the other—that sort of thing. If you ever heard of it! While she was at her sister's the parson wrote to me for to come over and see her. I knew what that was for; it was for her to go in the hospital again. So I says to

A. E. COPPARD

her when I got there : " You know what he wants to see me for ? "

" Yes," she says, " I do, but if I got to die I'll die at home along of you, I won't go in the hospital no more."

" Well, please yourself," I says. " You won't go ? "

" No," she says.

" Then it ain't no good my going to see him ? "

" No," she says, " that ain't."

The last day she was alive I went off to my work just before seven o'clock.

" You all right ? " I says.

" Yes," she says, and I got her up in bed and I put her slippers on.

" I'll cut your breakfast off before I go," I telled her.

" Do," she says. " I'll go down about eight o'clock."

Her sister used to come along and see her of a morning, but this morning sommat kept her back and she was late. Too late, for Sophy was gone, gone so sudden that there was a bit of that bread in her hand and another bit in her mouth. The hospital sent to me afterwards for a subscription and I give five shillings. Well, couldn' do no more. She was five foot eight.

There was a ripple of laughter from the listeners. Father Anthony clapped his hands.

" Admirable," he said. He had not expected that the ship's Dilettante had it in him ; an opinion which was shared by the rest of the party.

THE TALE OF THE DETECTIVE'S FRIEND

As the laughter died away Mr. Turpin was seen to be fidgeting in his chair. Mrs. Dane-Vereker looked at Mr. Butterworth.

"You are thinking . . . ?" she queried.

"Of a personal experience," replied that gentleman, and forthwith began to relate

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE TUTOR

THE TUTOR'S TALE ♣

A HOUSE OF GENTLE- FOLKS

By EVELYN WAUGH

I ARRIVED at Vanburgh at five to one. It was raining hard by now and the dreary little station yard was empty except for a deserted and draughty-looking taxi. They might have sent a car for me.

How far was it to Stayle? About three miles, the ticket collector told me. Which part of Stayle might I be wanting? The Duke's? That was a good mile the other side of the village. They really might have sent a car.

With a little difficulty I found the driver of the taxi, a sulky and scorbutic young man who may well have been the bully of some long-forgotten school story. It was some consolation to feel that he must be getting wetter than I. It was a beastly drive.

After the cross-roads at Stayle we reached what were obviously the walls of the park, interminable and dilapidated walls that stretched on past corners and curves with leafless trees dripping on to their dingy masonry. At last they were

THE TUTOR'S TALE

broken by lodges and gates, four gates and three lodges, and through the ironwork I could see a great sweep of ill-kept drive.

But the gates were shut and padlocked and most of the windows in the lodges were broken.

"There are some more gates further on," said the school bully, "and beyond them, and beyond them again. I suppose they must get in and out somehow, sometimes."

At last we found a white wooden gate and a track which led through some farm buildings into the main drive. The park land on either side was railed off and no doubt let out to pasture. One very dirty sheep had strayed on to the drive and stumbled off in alarm at our approach, continually looking over its shoulder and then starting away again until we overtook it. Last of all the house came in sight, spreading out prodigiously in all directions.

The man demanded eight shillings for the fare. I gave it to him and rang the bell.

After some delay an old man opened the door to me.

"Mr. Vaughan," I said. "I think his Grace is expecting me to luncheon."

"Yes; will you come in, please?" and I was just handing him my hat when he added: "I am the Duke of Vanburgh. I hope you will forgive my opening the door myself. The butler is in bed to-day—he suffers terribly in his back during the winter, and both my footmen have been killed in the war." *Have been killed*—the words haunted me incessantly throughout

the next few hours and for days to come. That desolating perfect tense, after ten years at least, probably more . . . Miss Stein and the continuous present; the Duke of Vanburgh and the continuous perfect passive. . . .

I was unprepared for the room to which he led me. Only once before, at the age of twelve, had I been to a ducal house, and besides the fruit garden, my chief memory of that visit was one of intense cold and of running upstairs through endless passages to get my mother a fur to wear round her shoulders after dinner. It is true that that was in Scotland, but still I was quite unprepared for the overpowering heat that met us as the Duke opened the door. The double windows were tight shut and a large coal fire burned brightly in the round Victorian grate. The air was heavy with the smell of chrysanthemums, there was a gilt clock under a glass case on the chimney-piece and everywhere in the room stiff little assemblages of china and bric-à-brac. One might expect to find such a room in Lancaster Gate or Elm Park Gardens where the widow of some provincial knight knits away her days among trusted servants. In front of the fire sat an old lady, eating an apple.

"My dear, this is Mr. Vaughan, who is going to take Stayle abroad—my sister, Lady Emily. Mr. Vaughan has just driven down from London in his motor."

"No," I said, "I came by train—the 12.55."

"Wasn't that very expensive?" said Lady Emily.

THE TUTOR'S TALE

Perhaps I ought here to explain the reason for my visit. As I have said, I am not at all in the habit of moving in these exalted circles, but I have a rather grand godmother who shows a sporadic interest in my affairs. I had just come down from Oxford, and was very much at a loose end when she learned unexpectedly that the Duke of Vanburgh was in need of a tutor to take his grandson and heir abroad—a youth called the Marquess of Stayle, eighteen years old. It had seemed a tolerable way in which to spend the next six months, and accordingly the thing had been arranged. I was here to fetch away my charge and start for the Continent with him next day.

"Did you say you came by train?" said the Duke.

"By the 12.55."

"But you said you were coming by motor."

"No, really, I can't have said that. For one thing I haven't got a motor."

"But if you hadn't said that, I should have sent Byng to meet you. Byng didn't meet you, did he?"

"No," I said, "he did not."

"Well, there you see."

Lady Emily put down the core of her apple and said very suddenly:

"Your father used to live over at Oakshott. I knew him quite well. Shocking bad on a horse."

"No, that was my uncle Hugh. My father was in India almost all his life. He died there."

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"Oh, I don't think he can have done that," said Lady Emily; "I don't believe he even went there—did he, Charles?"

"Who? what?"

"Hugh Vaughan never went to India, did he?"

"No, no, of course not. He sold Oakshott and went to live in Hampshire somewhere. He never went to India in his life."

At this moment another old lady, almost indistinguishable from Lady Emily, came into the room.

"This is Mr. Vaughan, my dear. You remember his father at Oakshott, don't you? He's going to take Stayle abroad—my sister, Lady Gertrude."

Lady Gertrude smiled brightly and took my hand.

"Now I knew there was someone coming to luncheon, and then I saw Byng carrying in the vegetables a quarter of an hour ago. I thought, now he ought to be at Vanburgh meeting the train."

"No, no, dear," said Lady Emily. "Mr. Vaughan came down by motor."

"Oh, that's a good thing. I thought he said he was coming by train."

II

The Marquess of Stayle did not come in to luncheon.

"I am afraid you may find him rather shy at first," explained the Duke. "We did not tell

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him about your coming until this morning. We were afraid it might unsettle him. As it is he is a little upset about it. Have you seen him since breakfast, my dear ? ”

“ Don’t you think,” said Lady Gertrude, “ that Mr. Vaughan had better know the truth about Stayle ? He is bound to discover it soon.”

The Duke sighed : “ The truth is, Mr. Vaughan, that my grandson is not quite right in his head. Not mad, you understand, but noticeably under-developed.”

I nodded. “ I gathered from my godmother that he was a little backward.”

“ That is largely why he never went to school. He went to a private school once for two terms, but he was very unhappy and the fees were very high ; so I took him away. Since then he has had no regular education.”

“ No education of any sort, dear,” said Lady Gertrude gently.

“ Well, it practically amounts to that. And it is a sad state of affairs, as you will readily understand. You see, the boy will succeed me and—well, it is very unfortunate. Now there is quite a large sum of money which his mother left for the boy’s education. Nothing has been done with it—to tell you the truth, I had forgotten all about it until my lawyer reminded me of it the other day. It is about thirteen hundred pounds by now, I think. I have talked the matter over with Lady Emily and Lady Gertrude, and we came to the conclusion that the best thing to do would be to send him abroad for a year with a

tutor. It might make a difference. Anyway, we shall feel that we have done our duty by the boy." (It seemed to me odd that they should feel that about it, but I said nothing.) "You will probably have to get him some clothes too. You see he has never been about much, and we have let him run wild a little, I am afraid."

When luncheon was over they brought out a large box of peppermint creams. Lady Emily ate five.

III

Well, I had been sent down from Oxford with every circumstance of discredit, and it did not become me to be over nice ; still, to spend a year conducting a lunatic nobleman about Europe was rather more than I had bargained for. I had practically made up my mind to risk my god-mother's displeasure and throw up the post while there was still time, when the young man made his appearance.

He stood at the door of the dining-room surveying the four of us, acutely ill at ease but with a certain insolence.

"Hullo, have you finished lunch? May I have some peppermints, Aunt Emily?"

He was not a bad-looking youth at all, slightly over middle height, and he spoke with that rather agreeable intonation that gentlepeople acquire who live among servants and farm hands. His clothes, with which he had obviously been at some pains, were unbelievable—a shiny blue suit with four buttons, much too small for him,

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showing several inches of wrinkled woollen sock and white flannel shirt. Above this he had put on a stiff evening collar and a very narrow tie, tied in a sailor-knot. His hair was far too long, and he had been putting water on it. But for all this he did not look mad.

"Come and say, 'How do you do?' to your new tutor," said Lady Gertrude, as though to a child of six. "Give him your right hand—that's it."

He came awkwardly towards me, holding out his hand, then put it behind him and then shot it out again suddenly, leaning his body forward as he did so. I felt a sudden shame for this poor ungraceful creature.

"How-d'-you-do?" he said. "I expect they forgot to send the car for you, didn't they? The last tutor walked out and didn't get here until half-past two. Then they said I was mad, so he went away again. Have they told you I'm mad yet?"

"No," I said decidedly, "of course not."

"Well, they will then. But perhaps they have already, and you didn't like to tell me. You're a gentleman, aren't you? That's what grandfather said: 'He's a bad hat, but at least he's a gentleman.' But you needn't worry about me. They all say I'm mad."

Anywhere else this might have caused some uneasiness, but the placid voice of Lady Gertrude broke in:

"Now, you mustn't talk like that to Mr. Vaughan. Come and have a peppermint, dear."

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And she looked at me as though to say, "What did I tell you?"

Quite suddenly I decided to take on the job after all.

An hour later we were in the train. I had the Duke's cheque for £150 preliminary expenses in my pocket; the boy's preposterous little wicker box was in the rack over his head.

"I say," he said, "what am I to call you?"

"Well, most of my friends call me Ernest."

"May I really do that?"

"Yes, of course. What shall I call you?"

He looked doubtful. "Grandfather and the aunts call me Stayle; everyone else calls me 'my Lord' when they are about and 'Bats' when we are alone. It's short for 'Bats in the Belfry,' you know."

"But haven't you got a Christian name?"

He had to think before he answered. "Yes—George Theodore Verney."

"Well, I'm going to call you George."

"Will you really? I say, have you been to London a lot?"

"Yes, I live there usually."

"I say. D'you know I've never been to London? I've never been away from home at all—except to that school."

"Was that beastly?"

"It was ——" He used a ploughboy's oath. "I say, oughtn't I to say that? Aunt Emily says I shouldn't."

"She's quite right."

"Well, she's got some mighty queer ideas, I

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can tell you," and for the rest of the journey he chatted freely. That evening he evinced a desire to go to a theatre, but remembering his clothes, I sent him to bed early and went out in search of friends. I felt that with £150 in my pocket I could afford champagne. Besides, I had a good story to tell.

We spent the next day ordering clothes. It was clear the moment I saw his luggage that we should have to stay on in London for four or five days; he had nothing that he could possibly wear. As soon as he was up I put him into one of my overcoats and took him to all the shops where I owed money. He ordered lavishly and with evident relish. By the evening the first parcels had begun to arrive and his room was a heap of cardboard and tissue-paper. Mr. Phillrick, who always gives me the impression that I am the first commoner who has dared to order a suit from him, so far relaxed from his customary austerity as to call upon us at the hotel, followed by an assistant with a large suitcase full of patterns. George showed a well-bred leaning towards checks. Mr. Phillrick could get two suits finished by Thursday. the other would follow us to the Crillon. Did he know anywhere where we could get a tolerable suit of evening clothes ready made? He gave us the name of the shop where his firm sold their misfits. He remembered his Lordship's father well. He would call upon his Lordship for a fitting to-morrow evening. Was I sure that I had all the clothes I needed at the moment? He had some patterns just in. As for that little

matter of my bill—of course, any time that was convenient to me. (His last letter had made it unmistakably clear that he must have a cheque on account before undertaking any further orders.) I ordered two suits. All of this George enjoyed enormously.

After the first morning I gave up all attempt at a tutorial attitude. We had four days to spend in London before we could start and, as George had told me, it was his first visit. He had an unbounded zeal to see everything, and, above all, to meet people; but he had also a fresh and acute critical faculty and a natural fastidiousness which shone through the country bumpkin. The first time he went to a revue he was all agog with excitement; the theatre, the orchestra, the audience all enthralled him. He insisted on being there ten minutes before the time; he insisted on leaving ten minutes before the end of the first act. He thought it vulgar and dull and ugly, and there was so much else that he was eager to see. The dreary "might-as-well-stay-here-now-we've-paid" attitude was unintelligible to him.

In the same way with his food, he wished to try all the dishes. If he found he did not like anything, he ordered something else. On the first evening we dined out he decided that champagne was tasteless and disagreeable and refused to drink it again. He had no patience for acquiring tastes, but most good things pleased him immediately. At the National Gallery he would look at nothing after Bellini's "Death of Peter Martyr."

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He was an immediate success with everyone I introduced him to. He had no "manner" of any kind. He said all he thought with very little reticence and listened with the utmost interest to all he heard said. At first he would sometimes break in with rather disturbing sincerity upon the ready-made conversations with which we are mostly content, but almost at once, he learned to discern what was purely mechanical and to disregard it. He would pick up tags and phrases and use them with the oddest twists, revitalising them by his interest in their picturesqueness.

And all this happened in four days; if it had been in four months the change would have been remarkable. I could see him developing from one hour to the next.

On our last evening in London I brought out an atlas and tried to explain where we were going. The world for him was divided roughly into three hemispheres—Europe, where there had been a war; it was full of towns like Paris and Budapest, all equally remote and peopled with prostitutes; the East, a place full of camels and elephants, deserts and dervishes and nodding mandarins; and America, which besides its own two continents included Australia, New Zealand, and most of the British Empire not obviously "Eastern"; somewhere, too, there were some "savages."

"We shall have to stop the night at Brindisi," I was saying. "Then we can get the Lloyd Trestino in the morning. What a lot you're smoking!"

We had just returned from a tea and cocktail party. George was standing at the looking-glass gazing at himself in his new clothes.

"You know, he has made this suit rather well, Ernest. It's about the only thing I learned at home—smoking, I mean. I used to go up to the saddle-room with Byng."

"You haven't told me what you thought of the party."

"Ernest, why are all your friends being so sweet to me? Is it just because I'm going to be a duke?"

"I expect that makes a difference with some of them—Julia for instance. She said you looked so fugitive."

"I'm afraid I didn't like Julia much. No, I mean Peter and that funny Mr. Oliphant."

"I think they like you."

"How odd!" He looked at himself in the glass again. "D'you know, I'll tell you something I've been thinking all these last few days. I don't believe I really am mad at all. It's only at home I feel so different from everyone else. Of course I don't know much . . . I've been thinking, d'you think it can be grandfather and the aunts who are mad, all the time?"

"They're certainly getting old."

"No, mad. I can remember some awfully dotty things they've done at one time or another. Last summer Aunt Gertrude swore there was a swarm of bees under her bed and had all the gardeners up with smoke and things. She refused to get out of bed until the bees were gone—and

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there weren't any there. And then there was the time grandfather made a wreath of strawberry-leaves and danced round the garden singing 'Cook's son, Dook's son, son of a belted earl.' It didn't strike me at the time, but that was an odd thing to do, wasn't it? Anyway, I shan't see them again for months and months. Oh, Ernest, it's too wonderful. You don't think the sleeves are too tight, do you? 'Are people black in Athens?'

"Not coal black—mostly Jews and undergraduates."

"What's that?"

"Well, Peter's an undergraduate. I was one until a few weeks ago."

"I say, do you think people will take me for an undergraduate?"

IV

It seems to me sometimes that Nature, like a lazy author, will round off abruptly into a short story what she obviously intended to be the opening of a novel.

Two letters arrived for me by the post next morning. One was from my bank returning the Duke's cheque for £150 marked "Payment Stopped"; the other from a firm of solicitors enjoining me that they, or rather one of them, would call upon me that morning in connection with the Duke of Vanburgh's business. I took them in to George.

All he said was: "I had a sort of feeling that this was all too good to last."

The lawyer duly arrived. He seemed displeased that neither of us was dressed. He intimated that he wished to speak to me alone.

His Grace, he said, had altered his plans for his grandson. He no longer wished him to go abroad. Of course, between ourselves we had to admit that the boy was not quite sane . . . very sad . . . these old families . . . putting me in such a difficult position in case anything happened. . . . His Grace had talked it over with Lady Emily and Lady Gertrude. . . . It really was too dangerous an experiment . . . besides, they had especially kept the boy shut away because they did not want the world to know . . . discredit on a great name . . . and, of course, if he went about, people were bound to talk. It was not strictly his business to discuss the wisdom of his client's decision, but, again between ourselves, he had been very much surprised that his Grace had ever considered letting the boy leave home. . . . Later perhaps, but not yet . . . he would always need watching. And of course there was a good deal of money coming to him. Strictly between ourselves, his Grace was a great deal better off than people supposed . . . town property . . . death duties . . . keeping up Stayle . . . and so on.

He was instructed to pay the expenses incurred up to date and to give me three months' salary . . . most generous of his Grace, no legal obligation. . . . As to the clothes . . . we really seemed rather to have exceeded his Grace's instructions. Still, no doubt all the things that had not been

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specially made could be returned to the shops. He would give instructions about that . . . he was himself to take Lord Stayle back to his grandfather.

And an hour later they left.

"It's been a marvellous four days," said George ; and then : " Anyway, I shall be twenty-one in three years and I shall have my mother's money then. I think it's rather a shame sending back those ties though. Don't you think I could keep one or two ? "

Five minutes later Julia rang up to ask us to luncheon.

" Did you ever hear of him again ? "

The question was Miss Pogson's. But before Mr. Butterworth could answer the Courier broke in with :

" Indefensible !—Monstrous ! These stately homes of England ! Bah ! I thank God I am of the proletariat. I heard of another experience like that, too. Even more demoralising—if that's possible."

Henry Scott chuckled.

" You have not, my friend, the ducal point of view. It takes the accumulation of many centuries to acquire. It is a point of view as unalterable as the Calendar, and as baffling as—as what we will call

THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER "

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE

GEMINI

By G. B. STERN

“**L**OOK here . . . what *has* become of David Merriman?”
They had asked this so often; but just to-night it seemed a good thing to go and find out. For they missed Merriman. They missed his vitality and his good-humour, and his preposterous habit of rushing away on by-issues, whatever subject was in discussion, like a river in full spate, and having to be dammed and damned for it!

Up till six weeks ago, Merriman had been accessible whenever they had wanted him, any or all of them; but lately, queer rumours were about; for he had not disappeared, after the fashion of Waring and other mysterious victims of the Wanderlust—

“What’s become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip?” . . .

—Corporeally, he was still present in London, in his rooms; except for one month when he had impulsively quitted them without leaving a clue

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE

as to his whereabouts. It was socially that he had given his comrades the slip. And then, these puzzling reports: "They say he's chucked his job on the *Gazette*. They say he's turned analytical chemist . . . something of that sort; they say he's hunting for the elixir of youth—as though Vardaroff hadn't already obligingly found it for us; they say he potters about all day and most of the night in his dressing-gown, with a jungle of beard on his face, pouring things out of bottles; they say he smashes the bottles and that his rooms are a heap of broken glass; they say he won't see anyone, that he's looking. . . . Oh, they say, they say, and they say . . ."

"Come on. I'm sick of this. Let's go and rout him out; make him dress and shave and spend the evening with us, like a human being."

So Prentice fetched his car from the garage, and they went off in search of David Merriman.

His three friends were anxious about him, in spite of their assumption that all they missed was his rollicking good company. The fourth man did not care. He was a new acquaintance brought in casually that night by Johnny Carfax; younger than the others, better dressed and better looking; a handsome youngster with an air of secret adventure, and not too scrupulous adventure at that! You could imagine him wearing a coat slung round his shoulders without putting his arms into the sleeves—that type of man! A man of easy conquest. He seemed amused at all this fuss about David Merriman. A sneer hung on his lips:

"If the poor beggar wants to be left alone to smash medicine bottles . . ." For he was reluctant to be hauled out of Prentice's comfortable chambers, having once been brought there. It was a blowy night, and the whisky was good, and what did Merriman matter, anyway?

"Why not ring up?" he suggested, lazily.

But the others took no notice. He was the youngest, and a stranger—a rather impudent stranger—and they did not want strangers; they wanted Merriman back again. Johnny Carfax wondered why he had bothered at all with young Nick Broom?

What *was* the matter with David?

His rooms were in the City; a deserted city that night; all the empty streets were full of wind, instead of the usual hustle and crowd. Merriman's rooms were at the top of the house. They banged and banged at the door, and nobody answered. Then suddenly came a crash—and a sombre trickle under the door. It was too melodramatic to be true; and Nick Broom laughed at the white faces of his companions:

"*That's* not blood," he said, in scoffing reassurance. "I've seen a lot of blood. Smell it if you doubt me. It's—yes, vermouth; Cinzano."

But Prentice had lost his head, and was pounding at the panels of the door as though he hoped to smash them. Then suddenly the door flew open, and there stood Merriman, looking like a conventional illustration of the weird stories they had heard about him; looking like Lucifer fallen from heaven with a whack. He was unshaven,

THE PSYCHIC RESEARCHER'S TALE

and wore his dressing-gown and slippers. But his aspect was hollow and hunted and wild, beyond these mere externals. Nor did he seem as pleased at the sight of his visitors as might have been expected from a man of such wontedly genial temperament.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked abruptly.

"Don't be a fool, Merriman!" cried Carfax impatiently. "Do you suppose we want to stop outside and shout through the door? If you've got something to hide, sling it in the cupboard, quick: him or her or it. We'll give you fifty seconds' grace."

Merriman shrugged his shoulders. "I've got something to find; nothing to hide."

"Missing will?"

He grinned impishly, more like the David they were familiar with. "Missing cocktail . . ." he said. "Come in, come in! I'm not so sure that I'm sorry to see you. This room is mouldy with enigmas, and I'm sick of groping. If you wanted to get to Hungary, Johnny, how would you do it? Would you go to the station and take a ticket? Would you go by train and boat and train again? Would you? Well, that's just what I can't do, you see. Oh, the splendid insolent simplicity of going to the station and taking a ticket! And here I am—stuck! I tell you, it's driving me mad!"

Mad? . . . The unswept floor of the room was piled high with bottles; so were the tables, chairs and shelves. Glasses and broken glasses were littered everywhere; and glasses half-full of

pale liquids, colourless or faintly-gold, dimly green, deep winking evil red. David Merriman, standing in the midst of this fantastic wreckage, this confusion of alchemy, standing there, a despairing djinn in a dressing-gown, brandishing his arms and shouting: "Open Sesame! Blast you! Open!" to an invisible box-office that was to take him to Hungary, and left him in the City of London. . . . What did it all mean? It was quite incredible, and quite incredibly idiotic.

"You'd better tell us about it, David," Carfax suggested gently. He and Prentice and Richardson were rather wishing that the new fellow were not looking on at this spectacle of a disintegrated Merriman.

"Look here," Richardson pounded out, for his spirit was the most laborious in the group—"look here, you know, Merriman, if you want to go to Hungary—and it beats me why anyone should!—If you want to go. . . . Look here, why the devil don't you let Cook or Lunn or one of those fellows fix you up? I suppose you're after a woman over there?—dark and gipsyish, aren't they? Not my type. . . . But sitting about, and turning down your friends, and drinking too much, won't take you far."

Their host burst into a shout of laughter: "Won't take me far!" he cried. And his arms involuntarily described a series of motions familiar to all of them: the flamboyant rhythm of cocktail shaking . . . in the air and without implements. So that Carfax shuddered at the grotesque spectacle; and he crunched a way over to the window,

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bits of glass snapping under his feet ; there at any rate he could look out ; need not watch the spectral pantomime by the ghost of a once sane and witty Merriman.

" Won't take me *far* ? But I tell you, it'll take me farther, when I succeed, *if* I succeed, than all your Cooks and your Lunn's and your wagon-lits ! It'll take me as far as I want to go : as far as Heaven and Hungary. . . . And, oh, Horace, you chump, do you really suppose I'm drinking too much just for the sake of getting drunk ? " Suddenly he seemed to perceive that Carfax, whom he had always liked best of the three, was definitely unhappy about him. " All right, Johnny, all right, all right—I'll tell you. Then you can judge. Horace won't believe a word of what I say, and it'll be good fun watching Horace not believing me—best fun I've had for weeks. I'm not sure that I believe myself. . . .

" You know, in the summer, I was rambling about Central Europe ? I stuck to the smaller places ; didn't go near Prague or Budapest or any of the capitals ; hadn't got the clothes, for one thing. At a village in the Carpathians, St. Rudigund, the host of the pub. asked me to try some home-grown Slivovitz ; not his own vintage ; his father's. It was pretty old, he said. He only had a few bottles left. It was unusual stuff, not too sweet, with a haunting flavour of plum running through it. I wanted a bottle to take home with me. In fact, it was to be a little present for Horace. . . . Say thank you, Horace, even though you never got it ! The old fellow made me pay

such a thumping price that I decided not to give it to Horace, after all.

When I got home—do you remember that night when I gave a dinner, and wasn't there? "

Prentice nodded. He had been one of the guests. And that had been the beginning of Merriman's oddness; the beginning of eccentric rumour. . . .

"I was going to mix the cocktails and have 'em ready, just before any of you turned up, when it struck me that I might invent a new one with a strain of Slivovitz in it. So I opened the bottle, and shook up one glassful, for myself, just to try it; it was by way of an experiment. I didn't put in more than a dash of the Slivovitz. . . .

"And there I was, drinking it at a table in a cabaret in some foreign town. There were Gipsies playing, the real Tzigany; and I thought at once that it might be Hungary; Budapest, probably. I recognised that sort of naked piano instrument they have, striking at the bars with two little balled sticks.

"No, *no*, it wasn't a magic carpet or any obvious damfool wizardry like that. I didn't fall asleep and dream, or fly through the air. I was just *there*—there and not here. It's simple enough. You believe a lot of more absurd things every day of your life, Horace, only you're used to them. You simply wouldn't *believe* the things that you believe!

"There I was, and not at all surprised. It was

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one of those pleasantly irresponsible cafés where you couldn't take your sister, and wouldn't if you could. Lewd and expensive and picturesque. Well patronised, too.

"Gipsy music slithers about the room like shining water ; you can't gather it up, or remember it afterwards ; but at the time, by God, it does make you feel a glorious beast ! I told you that there were no women there, didn't I ? The name of the café was Kiss Ludo. I saw it upside down over the entrance. Not a joke. Kisses are common in Hungary—Kiss Ludo ; the surname first. Presently, they brought in three enormous trays with huge silver dish-covers over them ; everybody applauded when the covers were whisked off—three girls lying thigh-deep in flowers ! *You'd* have applauded, Horace——" But Merri-man glared at Nicholas Broom, as though he had only just perceived that here was an intruder ; and disliked him fiercely on sight. "Yes, the usual continental cabaret surprise. But really pretty girls. One of them——" He dropped his voice . . . and again his hands described the mechanical motion of shaking a cocktail, as though they had done it for so long that now they acted without his volition—"One of them was lovely. She reminded me of the Kirschners we used to tack up on the walls of our huts at the beginning of the war, do you remember ? Swift and young and roguish. Delectable . . . ! Fair bobbed hair, very round and shining, like a golden apple. She leaped off her tray, scattering flowers, and ran, light-footed, straight to me ; yes, straight

over to my table, and knelt on the chair beside me. My word, I was flattered !

"She spoke a little French, about as much as I did. Waiting till the room was full of noise and music, she murmured :

" ' Take me back. I am frightened. I like you, I love you, but I am frightened. '

" ' Take you back where ? ' I asked.

" I was thunderstruck when she answered : ' Back to school ! '

" School, she said, was about thirty miles out of Budapest, on the plain. She couldn't quite explain to me—her French was too limited, or mine was !—how she came to be on the tray and under the dish-cover, in the café of Kiss Ludo. It didn't seem to me a normal position for any pupil at a young ladies' seminary, but I gathered that it was a joke ; that she had wanted to see life ; that she was bored at school ; and that she had changed places with one Marishka, whose name occurred several times in the story ; that now she had had enough of the joke, and please would I take her back ? ' I like you, I love you, I am frightened '—this was her refrain. I wondered how she would have got out of the scrape if she had found no one to like or love with quite so much cherubic confidence that the liking would be returned, and the love—wouldn't. Well . . . There's a dash of Rudolf Rassendyll in us all ! I picked up the little beauty, hoisted her on to my shoulder, and staggered out with her, swaggering and shouting as though she were my legitimate prize. That being presumed, nobody

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stopped us. The other two girls were left behind, and those gipsies were fiddling away like mad. . . . Their music was the incoming tide, dark and flowing. . . . We splashed through, and out into the street. Two or three cars were waiting on the cobbles, and I told her to bribe any driver of them—I couldn't speak their language, and she could!—to take her out to wherever her school was. Of what I should say to the headmistress—the headmistress, mark you!—I hadn't the remotest idea. I don't know now what I would have said if there had been a headmistress; only there wasn't, as you'll see presently.

"She was still wearing her Kirschner-girl costume, a sort of cowslip-coloured tunic in thin silk; so I wrapped her in my overcoat. We drove for nearly two hours over those mournful Hungarian plains that are velvety purple by day, decorated with tall yellow sunflowers and fat white geese. They spread like heartbreak to the horizon. . . . No end to them. Of course, this was night, and I couldn't see where we were going.

"She snuggled down into my arms, and slept. . . . It's time that somebody disproved the continental legend of the 'cold English.' . . . Damn silly legend!

"At last we drew up at some tall iron gates, obviously the entrance to quite a big garden, if not an estate.

" 'I know my way now,' said Carla. She had told me her name. And then: 'Good-bye. Thank you!' And put up her face to be kissed—the scamp!

“ ‘ Shall I see you again ? ’

“ ‘ It depends ! ’ She was poised, ready to be off.

“ ‘ Depends on *what* ? ’ I was in a blue funk that I should lose her altogether . . . while I waited for her answer.

“ Which, incidentally, I never got, because by then I was back here again.

“ No, I can’t tell you how it happened. It’s no good asking me. I just know that I didn’t wake up, or tumble down the chimney, or drift in on a moonbeam. Nothing of that sort. If the magic worked by any talisman—and it didn’t seem like magic ; it was all much too natural—but if it had a talisman, it was the cocktail . . . because I was still tightly grabbing the empty glass.

“ How long had I been away ? Yes, I thought you’d ask that. I had been away for exactly the amount of time I hadn’t been here—not allowing for a journey out to Hungary and back. I must have been about an hour in the café, and about an hour and three-quarters in the car ; and I left at—let me see, for what time had I invited you to dinner, Prentice ? Eight o’clock ? And I was getting the cocktail ready at, say, a quarter to eight. It was twenty to eleven when the adventure shrank up and ended. And here I stood, gaping, with the glass in my hand, and Carla’s clear laugh still in my ears, and not a blessed idea how I could get back to her !

“ It was a week before it dawned on me that the bottle of Slivovitz might have had something to do with it. So I dressed as carefully as a bridegroom—for I might be going to see Carla again at

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any moment ! and I drank some Slivovitz, neat. You would have laughed if you had seen the way my hand trembled when I poured it out. I spilt quite a lot of it on the table. . . .

“ And then, you know, I didn't budge ! Nothing whatever happened ! You'd have laughed still more to see me standing there expecting to be whisked off somehow into the fourth dimension in Hungary ; but standing on and on at my own dining-room table !

“ I racked my memory for every story of enchantment that I had ever read ; and I came to the conclusion that each detail had got to be exactly the same—to make the same spell work in the same way, and to the same end. So I waited till it was a quarter to eight, and I mixed myself exactly the same cocktail—I remembered the ingredients, because I had been rather precise about them, on that first occasion ; I had wanted to impress Dicky Foster, who's inclined to be swollen-headed about his private recipes.

“ I drank. . . .

“ It was all right, this time. I was back again in Hungary. But no, not in exactly the same place ; but in some sort of a great hall in a castle. Indeed—because I needn't bother you with my discoveries in proper sequence !—I learnt afterwards that it was the inside instead of the outside of Carla's ' School.' School ?—The little devil ! It was no more a school than this house is a school. It was her husband's country seat ; and he was a count or a field-marshal—or both. At any rate, his servants saluted him.

" . . . Carla appeared presently. She came into the hall, where I sat disconsolate, looking at the great antlered beasts on the walls, and wondering where the hell I was this time, and what was going to happen next? She came down the carved staircase, very much *grande dame*, very decorous, and very decorative; and told me politely how glad she was to welcome me, and how sorry that her husband was away hunting.

" It was an unsatisfactory evening, on the whole. For she remained chilly; not in the least like the gamine whom I had seen carried on a tray in a heap of roses. She was so frigid that I hardly dared remind her of that escapade; nor ask her why she had played the trick on me, of pretending that she was still a schoolgirl when she was a wife? But at last, I did call up enough courage. She frowned at first, bewildered and angry. Then a gleam of light broke through—a very pale gleam.

" 'That must have been my wicked little sister, Carla. My twin sister. I am Zena, not Carla. We are so alike that it is difficult to tell us apart.'

" 'Is she,' I inquired, my heart thumping, 'is she in the castle now?'

" 'Yes, she lives with me. I would like to have left her longer at school, but they would not have her. She is too naughty and wild. So we are going to marry her quickly to a friend of my husband's.'

" After that, she wouldn't speak of Carla any more. I paid her compliments in stilted French. But Zena, who was, more formally, the Countess

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Janoschoza, didn't like me ; or, if she did, she was too virtuous to show it. So she kept me in my place. . . . I might have been a vassal ; they are feudal, those Hungarians ! I was given refreshments ; shown pictures. And still I sat there, longing and longing for Carla to come in. I didn't see Carla that time. . . .

" How in God's name did they account for me ? I couldn't account for myself, certainly. But all the people I met took me for granted.

" . . . Back I came, to these rooms of mine. Ten o'clock was striking. Forty minutes less than my last allowance of Paradise. The cocktail might have been slightly smaller.

You can imagine, can't you, how I spent my time after that ? I dared not keep on going back and back. Suppose I used up all my time, and that precious bottle of Slivovitz, on long sedate amiable conversations with the Countess Zena, who was so like my wicked little love, Carla ? So pretty, and so strikingly alike, but in behaviour how different !

" But I did see Carla again, on my fifth visit to the castle. By then, I was getting desperate. On my fifth visit I saw Carla, and not Zena. Carla was as provocative and as impetuous as ever—and as fond of me. She only laughed when I demanded, with as much fierceness as I could command, how she had dared make me her buffoon on our last encounter ?

" ' It was fun ! ' she cried.

" In my between-times here in London, in these rooms—for they only counted as between-

times now ; my new life, the life that mattered, was away on that fantastic bit of existence that had got loose and was floating about !—but in my between-times I was trying to learn Hungarian, so that I could reach a more enlightened understanding with the twin sisters than by paying compliments to Zena or kissing Carla. Have you ever tried to learn Hungarian, any of you ? It's worse than Chinese. Somehow, when it came to the point, however much I swotted, I could never remember any more than *hideg* and *meleg*, hot and cold. ' Hot ' meant Carla, and ' cold ' was Zena, and I got no forrarder, and the Slivovitz was sinking in its bottle. Not a wine-merchant in London had ever heard of the stuff, leave alone supply it. I consoled myself by planning that, of course, the minute I had finished it, I could go out to Hungary properly, in a decent normal fashion, and stay there as long as I liked. It would be easy enough to find out the café in Budapest where I had begun my adventures, and easy enough to discover the castle of Count Janoschoza. Nevertheless, I was beginning to get worried—lots of things were worrying me. . . . I never saw the twins together ; that was odd. And then, neither of the sisters seemed curious about my spasmodic comings and goings ; and I couldn't explain them ; the whole affair was so incredible, and none of us knew enough French ; and I wasn't there long enough ; and I wanted Carla with me always. I had a horrible notion that Carla might equally have said to whatever strange man had shot in on a cocktail, so to speak :

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‘ I like you, I love you, I am frightened ! ’ Supposing I lost the trick of re-entrance ! Supposing the power went to somebody else ; somebody better looking, more—more dashing, than myself ? And at the mere idea of such a rival . . .

“ Oh, well, it’s no good raving !

“ My paper gave me the chuck at about that time. They said I was growing too absent-minded. That was literally the matter with me—absent-minded ! Soul and mind and heart were absent, and only my reluctant body dragging about here in London.

“ When I made my cocktail with the last of the Slivovitz—a bigger dose than usual !—I reckoned it would carry me over to the fourth dimension, or wherever it was, for about four hours. I had quite decided that this time I would contrive to make a definite appointment with Carla, only coming into Hungary the right way round—the real way.

“ But I forgot !

“ You’ll hardly credit that. But if you’d had the same revelation . . . you’d have forgotten. It knocked everything else to blazes.

“ The revelation was just this : there were no twins ; Carla was Zena, and Zena was Carla ; and she thought she was twins. It was her delusion.

“ No wonder I had never seen them together ! They had each talked so convincingly of ‘ my sister ’ : Zena a trifle wistfully, as though regretting that little Carla was so wild and unmanageable and did such freakish things ; and Carla, or Zena, rebelliously, a pout on her lips, her eyes sullen : Zena was so staid. She had married a year ago,

when she was only seventeen ! And Zena was so good ; she never did anything bad ; she would not even betray her husband, she ! . . .

" I was told about this—this gemini complex—by a charming elderly Hungarian who spoke English, and whom I met there that night, at a dinner-party to which I didn't in the least want to go, only I had been tipped into the middle of it at somewhere round the third course, so that I couldn't very well rise and walk out. But my hours were too precious to waste in this fashion, and I sat there hating my neighbour, and wondering where Carla was ? Where did she always hide herself ? Surely she could be present, knowing that I worshipped her ! that I was crazy for her !—crazy as Tzigany music stealing at night over the plains. . . .

" Zena sat at the head of the table. She smiled at me very graciously ; but I knew she didn't like me. I guessed the elderly gentleman who spoke English to be the friend of Count Janoschoza, for whom they destined Carla, because she was ripe for marriage. Ripe . . . at eighteen, continental fashion ! If only I had carried her off that first time, instead of bringing her home to her sister . . . to herself ! But I had been too dazed to realise what I should have done ; and now I was too helpless and hemmed in—hemmed in by that exacting duenna, a bottle of Slivovitz ! What a position for a lover !

" If I could only see Carla again, and get her well started for England, by the time my spell had stopped its work—and then meet her at the

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other end—You see what I mean, don't you? No, of course you don't . . . Horace looks as though he'd like to take my temperature!

"The Tokay Aszúbar—seventy years old—was put on the table with the dessert; and the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room. They were very formal, these assemblies at the castle. It was then that I dropped into conversation with the only man present who could speak English—my rival, as I rather melodramatically termed him in my mind.

"He said: 'Do you not think our hostess is very beautiful?'

"I answered, daring him: 'Yes, but not so beautiful as her sister; as her twin sister.'

"And then he told me.

" . . . I was not as surprised as you might have supposed. Subconsciously, I already had suspicions. I had never once seen them together. It had always been Carla or Zena; never Carla *and* Zena.

"Where I cursed my luck was that so often, by some whimsical irony, I met the Zena side of Carla, who was cold and virtuous and a little antagonistic; and so rarely, so very rarely, I had the good fortune to arrive just at the propitious moment to meet the Carla side of Zena. . . .

"I vowed grimly that I would wait no longer, but that the very next time Carla was uppermost—well, the Carla delusion, then; I don't care how you put it!—I would take what the cocktail gods had sent me. I needn't mind. The child had a husband, a protector. I needed to mind

when I had thought of her as the little sister—the delicious urchin who looked up wide-eyed at the stranger from England, and said : ‘ I like you, I love you ! ’

“ I strolled out into the garden, after dinner. That Tokay was heavy, rich and cloying. While we sipped it, the Count clapped his hands, and got his gipsy band in to play for us. So my pulses were racing that night !

“ Down by the iron gates where I had first left Carla, I met her again—on the inside, this time. She was, of course, wearing the same dress as she had been wearing when she had sat as Zena at the head of her table. But I knew she was not Zena any more, for she ran straight into my arms.

“ . . . At that moment, the devils dropped me back here. I don’t know who they are, or what they are or why they do it, but damn them ! Damn them ! The devils ! They know I can’t get back to her. . . . Damn them !

“ I never saw her again. Though I went straight out to Hungary, by train and boat and train, I couldn’t find the café of Kiss Ludo. There are dozens of Kisses—all up the streets of Budapest. The name is as common as Smith in England. But just this one café didn’t exist. Nor, as far as I could discover, did the castle of Count Janoschoza exist ; not on the normal and conscious plane, anyway. I circled Budapest at a radius of twenty and thirty and forty miles, like a hound casting. I went nearly frantic. I made inquiries everywhere.

“ . . . But all that world, and all those people

who dwelt in it, they couldn't be reached in the direct way. Perhaps they had no independent existence apart from an unholy cocktail.

"I wasn't going to give up Carla, though. Obviously, the next thing to be done, was to go to St. Rudigund, in the Carpathians, and get a good supply of Slivovitz—all that I could persuade the inn-keeper to let me buy. It didn't matter what it cost—if it cost every penny I owned, Carla was worth it. Not Zena, you understand, who adored her husband, but *Carla*. And our meetings had only been one in seven! If I had had any sense of humour left, that would have amused me!

At St. Rudigund, the old chap I knew had died, and his successor at the inn had drunk all the remaining Slivovitz except seven bottles. I paid a fantastic price for these, because I simply couldn't bother to hide my eagerness. Then I rushed home. I dared not risk starting off from any other place, in case it would only work using the same room, the same table, the same glass, the same shaker. Carla was waiting, and somebody else might come along—she was like a fruit near its perfect hour . . . one tap would knock it to the ground.

"Carla! . . . If you'd heard my heart thump as I sloshed in the ingredients, careful not to waste the Slivovitz, shook up the cocktail, poured it out, and drank it . . . Carla . . . Carla. . . .

"Again, not a damn thing happened. I stopped where I was.

"After the first shock of disappointment, it struck me that the cocktail hadn't tasted quite the same. Either the quality in one of the bottles,

or the proportions were different. How much gin had I put in before? And just how much French Vermouth? I hardly used any Italian, the Slivovitz made that unnecessary. A spot of lemon; a dash of bitters. . . . Well, but a slack estimate of spots and dashes wasn't good enough. I had to remember exactly. It tasted wrong. I knew the right shade and flavour, as it ought to be, but this agitated tearing round Europe had shaken my memory. *How much of the French Vermouth. How much gin?* Did I jerk the Angostura twice or three times through the dropper?

"It was no good," David Merriman finished, morosely. "I've been at it ever since. No good. I've almost given up." During the latter part of his tale, he had been mechanically pouring out liquids from the bottles on the table, as though he could not stop doing it now: as though he would have to go on mixing cocktails all his life, till perhaps accident should slant him obliquely on to the recipe he had forgotten. The men who listened to the story noticed a dark plum-coloured bottle, square in shape, with no label on it. He poured out all that was left of it, tilting it upside-down as he did so. Then, in a sudden fury, he shook and shook and shook at the cocktail, holding the shaker high above his head, still with that hopeless rhythm of movement, as though he neither knew nor cared any more what would be the result, but was forced by some goblin Council of Ten to go on shaking cocktails for their amusement. Finally, noticing with listless amusement what he had been doing, he poured out the

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mixture, and nonchalantly passed the glass to Johnny Carfax.

"Try it?" he suggested. "It's the only refreshment I can offer you. It's about the hundred and seventh of a long line. I shall have to chuck it now, as there's no Slivovitz left; and Horace, bless his kind heart, can remove me quickly to a lunatic asylum."

Carfax said: "Not in my line, thanks. I don't mind a glass of sherry, but cocktails——" He shook his head, and passed on the glass to young Broom, who was nearest.

"Good luck!" cried Nick Broom, and drank it off.

. . . They all stared at the space where he had been standing.

The effect of this story on the Company was remarkable. Mrs. Dane-Vereker looked politely incredulous—Miss Pennock bewildered. Henry Scott and Barnabas MacWhirter Smith were frankly amused. Vivian Spencer, on the other hand, assumed the "there are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio" look.

Among the rest the tale occasioned a good deal of interested chatter. The Courier, needless to say, found in it yet another excuse for an opening—which was duly nipped in the bud by Miss Pogson and her

FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE SCHOOLMARM

THE SCHOOLMARM'S TALE •

THE VISITORS' BOOK

By NAOMI ROYDE-SMITH

“ALL my people,” said Mrs. Messidge firmly, “has been for the most part nice people. Reely nice I mean. Married or lady friends. I don’t reely hold with singles. Not unless they come for one night an’ I oblidge. Twelve-and-six, to cover extry washing.”

Mrs. Messidge paused.

Julia Debenham took a queen-cake carefully from the crochet flounces of the d’oyley in which it was ennested. It had one candied cherry at its tip and others showed plump under the glaze of its mellow substance. Its rim was crisp and lightly brown, and there was a promise of currants and lemon-peel in the porous inward slopes of its base. It was a perfect queen-cake.

For a moment or two she said nothing. She was wishing that her landlady would leave her in solitude to finish her tea. But Mrs. Messidge was clearly pausing for a reply. So Julia said :

“Yes, Mrs. Messidge.”

“Yes, Miss, I agree. And I hope it mayn’t

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be long before you have some friend down to liven you up a bit. It's dullish for elderly persons out here in the country."

Julia felt a slight pique. She had, it is true, found herself inclined to lose count of her birthdays ever since the thirty-ninth of them, though, unlike her sister Maude, she had not, so far, begun to go backwards in time. But Maude, who had once been two years her junior, was married, and, of course, with a man to consider . . . Still, even she, Julia, had never yet thought of herself as elderly.

"It's very kind of you, Mrs. Messidge," she said a little coldly, "but I am quite active still and shall enjoy walking in this beautiful countryside. Besides, you told me you had let your second bedroom from next Monday."

"I have done. To very old people of mine. Married with one little boy. They come here for their 'unnymoon. The little boy's six or seven now. He'll sleep on the settin'-room couch, bless his little heart. I'll show you their names in the Visitors' Book."

"Well, in that case you'd not have room for anyone, even if my sister were to come down," said Julia. She cut the queen-cake and saw how light the crumb, how moist the fruit that made it showed, as the cake fell apart on each side of the knife?

"Not room? Why, I've put you in the biggest bed in the 'owse! Three's slept in it before now. I'm not at all used to lettin' that bed to a single boarder."

Mrs. Messidge paused on her way to a tiered and crowded what-not which filled one corner of the little room, and fixed her single boarder with a heavy stare.

"It's a beautiful bed," said Julia, "but I have never been in the habit of sharing my bed with anybody. Even as a child . . . I couldn't ask—I shouldn't like . . ."

"No." Mrs. Messidge reached a hand to an upper shelf of the what-not and abstracted from it a stout and rather flabby album bound in red padded morocco. "I was afraid of that when I saw you come in just now. The lady as took the room for you was a married lady. Come here in her car with her gentleman and stopped for tea. 'Mrs. Messidge,' she said, 'your tea is too wonderful.' And when she see the rooms so clean and well furnished, 'Mrs. Messidge,' she says, 'these rooms is just the very thing for my sister,' she says; 'them Eyetalian photographs is just what'll please her, seeing she can't leave the country herself this year,' she says. And as she chose the best bed and this settin'-room with the two armchairs and the peeanner I made no question but wot you was a married couple."

"But surely one person is less trouble?"

"And less money. Ten shillin's a day, *per person*, with lights extra is what I look for, miss. And good value for the money too. See for yourself how my people think of what they find here." And Mrs. Messidge laid the Visitors' Book open on the table where it overlapped the red and white fringed tea-cloth which was laid

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diagonally over the deep pile of the chenille table-cover beneath it.

With one powerful forefinger she indicated the second and longer of the two entries that filled the pink, gilt-edged page.

Julia Debenham raised her tortoiseshell lorgnon and peered at the script.

"*Rose Villa*," she read in the flowing flourishes of an exuberant hand, "*is a home from home. We are on our honeymoon and cannot speak too highly of the good food and hearty welcome given us both by kind Mrs. Messidge, who has been in every sense a mother to us all the happy time we have spent under her most hospitable roof.*

"*JOHN and ELSIE BAKER, LONDON.*"

"That was in July 1914," said Mrs. Messidge. "They come back again whenever he was on leaf during the war, and yet again last Witsun. Very nice people indeed."

"Very nice," Julia murmured absently. She was reading an earlier encomium.

"*The Rev. Mr. Robert and Mrs. Adkins of Shepherd's Bush*," it ran, "*are happy to express their sense of Mrs. Messidge's kind hospitality and hope to return to Rose Villa ere long.*" In another and more faltering hand were added the words: "*A home from Home.*"

Julia commented on the recurrence of the phrase.

"All my people says it," said Mrs. Messidge. "A home from home. That's what Rose Villa is. Your sister, Miss Debenham, said it herself. 'Mrs. Messidge,' she said, 'this is a home from

home, my sister won't know she's away once she gets here, what with the photographs and all.' "

Even if the language ascribed to her had been in the least like anything Maude, who had strong views of what might and might not be said to the lower orders, could possibly be imagined as saying to Mrs. Messidge, the room in which Julia was having her first meal in Rose Villa was so unlike her own Queen Anne drawing-room in her little house in Kensington that, glancing around her, she could hardly conceal her dismay.

It was not the ordinary summer lodging-house room : it was the Highest Common Measure of all lodging-house parlours that have ever been crammed with unnecessary things. It was a bloated and prosperous parlour. Everything in it was the best of its kind. From the scented geranium that thrust its luxuriance of pink bloom, velvet leaf, and hairy stem over the serrations of a hanging vase made in the likeness of half an ostrich egg, that hung on chains between the stiff white Nottingham lace of the curtained bay-window, to the saddle-bag plush of the armchairs already pointed out by their owner, there was nothing in the room that Julia could not have wished out of it. The wall-paper was apparently a rich thing in chrysanthemums and assorted fruit. But only small portions of it were visible between the frames of pictures ranging in subject from a photograph (much enlarged) of Mrs. Messidge herself, taken at a period when she still emulated Queen Alexandra in coiffure and jewellery, to those photographs of Italy to

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which Julia owed Maude's selection of Rose Villa as her place of rest and change.

It was the photographs which chiefly troubled her. There were three of them ; large handsome pieces of coloured splendour, their titles printed in gilt lettering across the foreground at the right-hand bottom corner, well above the gilt mount which separated each oily picture from its heavily moulded pale green and white frame.

One was of the Matterhorn in summer, very black and patchy where it was not dappled with snow, with a striking sunset sky behind it. A slight mildew had broken through the rose and blue of the background. This was not precisely an Italian view. But to Maude, who went to Monte Carlo or Biarritz when she left her native isle, Switzerland and Italy were of one and the same indistinguishable doddiness, and the appellation was just enough when it was remembered that Maude had fitted it to its frame.

The other two were certainly Italian. The Bridge of Sighs, very like a Bath Oliver biscuit in colour, spanned a glaucous canal in one of them : and a bird's-eye view of Rome, very brown as to the architecture, sprawled under the same diffusion of pink and turquoise as filled the sky behind the Matterhorn in the other. The landlady marked and misinterpreted Julia's glance at these works of science.

" Yes," she said, " them's the ones your sister noticed. There are five more in the bedroom. Left me by two of my people. Lady and gentleman—very artistic they was—and travelled—but

they always spent August here. The lady specially was a very nice lady. Clever too. She took these photographs herself. With her own hands."

Mrs. Messidge uttered this alarming lie with emphasis. She had, Julia felt, made the statement to others who had questioned it.

Julia was a mild though not a naturally meek woman. •

"Was her name Alinari?" she asked unwisely.

Mrs. Messidge gathered the tea things together with a noisy hand.

"No," she answered. "It was Jones. And supper's at seven-thirty. Would you like cocoa to it?"

"I prefer to dine at eight as a rule," said Julia; "and I never drink cocoa at any time."

"No hot meals here at night," said Mrs. Messidge from the doorway. "Dinner at one, or quarter-past if it's a fine day and you're taking a longish walk in the morning. Tea at four. You can have an egg to your tea if you like, and supper at seven to half-past. That's the rule at Rose Villa." And she backed from the room carrying her tray under one arm, and closed the door behind her with a vanquishing clash.

Left to herself, at last Julia Debenham rose from the chair on which she had sat at table. The grey cotton-crêpe of her washing-frock clung to the stiff pile of the seat. She wrenched it away with a little tug of dislike. The armchairs, heavy with chair-backs and painted satin cushions, were covered in the same prehensile stuff. Never could she sit in them. She looked about her

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at the room she must inhabit for three whole weeks. The empty grate was masked by a manifold screen, on each panel of which a languishing dog was painted. There were four of these canine portraits; a mastiff, a retriever, a ferociously intellectual fox terrier, and a pug over the corrugations of whose visage the artist had taken manifest and wasted trouble as well as using a great deal of black and tannish paint. All four animals gazed straight upward into the very eyes of the observer of their effigies. Julia, who had never cared for dogs, found the combined appeal of these painted glances almost as embarrassing as she would have found the attentions of their living originals. A wave of longing for the bare, white walls of the room in the little convent-hotel at Siena where, in happier years, she had always ended her April journey, washed over her mind, unsteady the purpose fixed there.

It was two years now since she had pushed aside the shutters and looked through the rounded arch of that sun-haunted sanctuary, into the walled garden below. For the first time in fifteen years—she did not count the strange, swift years of the war, so long to live through, so incredibly short to look back over—for the first time in fifteen years she had not gone to visit William Vernon's grave on the anniversary of his death. And this was the second year she had missed that pilgrimage, missed it voluntarily. She would miss it again next year. And then, the waiting-time would be over. George, who was doing quite well at Oxford, would have come

through his finals, and she would be free to economise for that spring travelling again.

George was her nephew, the only son of her only brother. Henry Debenham had been killed on the Somme in 1916. He was Maude's nephew as well, and Maude and Bentley had been very good about it. They had paid the boy's school fees. He was in the first term at Berkhamstead at the time of his father's death. But, two years ago, when he had won a scholarship at Balliol which his mother could not afford to supplement, Bentley had struck. He had not been to the 'Varsity himself, and he did not propose to pay George to go there. He offered young George a place in the City, where he would be earning money and able to help his mother a little at once. And George, who had, so his headmaster assured Mrs. Debenham, the makings of a fine classical scholar in him, had been so piteously dismayed at the thought of a City office and had gone about for several days with such a white despair in his face that Joyce Debenham had gone to Julia.

"I can't bear it, Julia," said the widow. "Harry always meant the boy to go to Oxford. Is there anything in the world I could do—is there any way you could think of? It only means £50. I can just manage £20, but that will mean no holidays and no new clothes. I don't mind that a bit. Only it isn't enough. And I must keep the house going for him to come back to."

And Julia, after a wakeful night and a perfectly horrid morning with herself, had found the way. Her month in Italy had cost her a little over

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£30, since the war. Before that she had done it for less. And £30 was really more than she could quite afford. But she had spent it in 1920 and 1921, and she was going to spend it again next year. Going to Siena was a thing she had always done for her own satisfaction. Maude had often scolded her for it. It wasn't, said Maude, as if Julia had been married to the man, or had ever been likely to be. Everyone knew about his wife. There was, Maude did not hesitate to say so, something a little ridiculous, if not actually improper in the way Julia persisted in the delusion that she was entitled to visit his grave, a thing the man's widow never dreamt of doing. Julia did not argue with Maude on the point, nor did she remind her that the real widow had become another man's wife, long before the headstone had been fixed over William Vernon's grave. She was very much afraid that Maude would find out that the widow hadn't even paid for that.

She had always regretted that, in the first agonies of her grief, during the summer after her first return from Siena, the summer after his death—she had never ceased to regret that she had told Maude about it. As Maude herself said, there was really nothing to tell. Just a few walks and talks. They hadn't even stayed at the same hotel. Maude had gone so far as to tell Joyce that she believed the whole business was a delusion of Julia's. "Everyone knew that William Vernon was a famous painter in his way, and artists are notorious for making fools of women.

Besides, Julia was over thirty at the time and . . .” Maude broke off here and, after a thoughtful moment added: “Of course I’m so *many* years younger than Julia that I can’t really remember how the thing happened, and I daresay Julia softened the details for my infant ears.”

Maude, at the time of William Vernon’s death, had been actually two and a half years younger than Julia. But that was before she met Bentley Streatham. Since her marriage, and, indeed, for several years before it, Maude had grown younger with each birthday, and now had forgotten that Julia belonged to the same decade as herself. Joyce was much younger than either of her sisters-in-law, so young indeed that for some years she had believed that Maude rather than Julia was the friend she must make in her husband’s family. But, now that she was thirty-eight and a widow with a son who was making himself ill, who might even die of grief because she couldn’t afford to send him to Oxford, Joyce realised that, in the really important ways, Julia was the same age as she was. Maude with her car and her shingled head and her bridge parties and dance-club was years older than either of them.

So George went to Oxford and Julia stayed at home very quietly for two years. The little panelled house with the cobbled court-yard, and the attic bedroom, and the beautiful long drawing-room with its many-paned windows and the tall narrow powdering-closet, was the fifth in the little row of houses which had been built for Queen Mary’s Maids of Honour in the days when the

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Court went into residence at Kensington Palace for the summer months of every year. Julia was very proud of its history and its charm.

But the Maid of Honour houses were planned and placed long before Kensington High Street became the drapers' highway, and had shadowed road and lane with tall shops and dark warehouses and the stables and garages of commerce. And, though they still were adorable to live in during the autumn and winter, if your maid didn't mind the dungeon in which she had to cook, they made narrow, airless dwellings as soon as the warm weather came. Julia had usually gone to the sea in July and August with Joyce and Henry and the child, after spending a happy June, going to parties and theatres and picture galleries when she got back from Italy and had bought her London summer clothes, at the end of May. But, now that she and Joyce were leagued together in a tacit but so more binding economy, the eight weeks at the sea had gone the same way as the April pilgrimage. George, who was growing very attractive, had his reading parties and, later, invitations to take him through the Long Vacation, and Joyce achieved a mysterious change of air, vanishing into Scotland on "mutual terms," a phrase she had used with immediate effect when Maude had inquired how she could afford to spend six weeks at the most expensive hotel to which her letters were addressed. Maude had blushed suddenly, and thereafter had refrained from any spoken comment on Joyce's way of life. She and Bentley washed their hands of

the whole business and went to Norfolk for the shooting.

But Julia remained in London and read *The Life of Saint Catherine* and a great many books by Sabatier and Evelyn Underhill, and, in the early mornings, walked in Kensington Gardens before they were overrun by the schoolchildren of Earl's Court and the Portobello Road who, like Miss Debenham, were spending their summer holiday in town.

It was all very well for the first year. There was a novelty about staying in London at the times she had always been away from it; and there was also, it cannot be denied, the exhilaration which visits all those who make a deliberate sacrifice and see that they have not denied themselves in vain. George's happy face when he came to say good-bye to his aunt before going up to Oxford for his second Michaelmas term was like a gleam of sunshine, illuminating the quiet memory of her home-keeping months. And the knowledge that she and Joyce were, in a common bond, defying Maude, and doing perfectly well without Bentley's aid, was, though they never spoke of it, secretly uplifting to both women.

But in the second year things grew more difficult. There was no novelty, when April came, in staying quietly in Kensington. During the war she had, at least, been in France at first, and then busy dispensing at the Canadian officers' hospital in Queen's Gate at the time when she should have been in Siena. Now that occupation was gone. She began to pine for a change, to

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dwell, with none of her old sober joy, in the memory of the part she had held in William Vernon's life-work. And, towards the end of the month, she had a really bad attack of influenza which kept her in bed for three weeks and left her quite unfit to face the summer without a change of air.

It was Maude who came to the rescue. There was this to be said for Maude—she had a firm hand in emergencies.

"You must go away for a week or two. You can't expect to get well moping in this poky little house."

"I can't afford it, I'm afraid," said Julia. "I've had a good many expenses lately."

"You can let this house. Ada Parham will give you three guineas a week for it till the end of June—which, seeing that she can't have her maid to sleep in, is all you can expect, and I'll find you some comfortable rooms in the country, and, with Ada's money, you'll not spend anything like as much as you have to spend in Italy every year."

Maude had no admitted knowledge of Julia's reason for not spending anything in Italy this year. And she soon found the rooms she thought would do.

"My dear," she said, in the manner she used when she was pleased and amused, "it's a perfect place. The most motherly old body. And you'll simply scream at her rooms. Wax fruit and a Bible on a mat! The garden is full of roses, and you can sit in a little summer-house all day. We had our tea there. Dee-licious! And her

Visitors' Book is just one long rave. I'll take you down on Wednesday or Thursday. It depends which day Bentley can let me have the car in the afternoon."

And Maude had been as good as her word. She had driven Julia down to Tillingfield after luncheon and had left her with a playful injunction to Mrs. Messidge to take care of the invalid. And here she was. And being here, she must make the best of it.

There was always the garden. You couldn't furnish a garden. She took *Centuries of Meditation* from the books she had brought down with her, and had been constrained to lay in places on the uneven surface of a stringwork table-cover that was securely nailed on to the top of a small unsteady table in the window, and went into the garden.

The summer-house was, as Maude had described it, a bower of roses. It was rather more furnished than is usual in summer-houses, being full of a square rustic table and half a dozen even more rustic chairs; but the sun was bright outside and the shade was sweet within, and Julia settled herself as comfortably as she could on the knotty seat of the lowest chair and opened 'Traherne at the Fourth Century.'

"*He thought the stars as fair now, as they were in Eden, the sun as bright, the sea as pure . . .*"

Julia stopped reading. That was how William had seen the world—"the sun as bright, the sea as pure." Always, for him, there was depth in colour, radiance in light. More than for other

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people. He was acquainted with Beauty. The artist and the saint had the same vision, however differently each might interpret it. . . .

"Excuse me, Miss Debenham, but the arbour's left free of an afternoon in case there's teas wanted. People may come in any minute now. People in cars. Nice people. They prefer this to the George. My people know they can get China or Lyons here—and home-made jam of the best. You're welcome to set in the arbour of a morning, but afternoon's it's left free."

Mrs. Messidge delivered herself of this explanation standing, with arms akimbo, on the path outside the summer-house door. She had donned a formidable hat ; not a new hat, but one on which its owner had clearly relied for years as an aid to firmness. Julia quailed before it, but did not immediately succumb.

"I'll go, of course, the moment anyone comes," she said, making an effort to remain seated and to appear unconcerned.

"You'll have to go now, miss," said Mrs. Messidge, "I can't have you setting here a-discouraging of people. If they get to the gate and catches sight of you, like as not they'll go down the road. There's a person down the road as started teas, and she's got a lot of little tables all spread with cloths in the garden. 'Ardly decent I call it."

"Very well," said Julia, mustering what dignity she could. And then, with an effort to reassert herself and to settle an important point, she added :

"Would it suit you better to let me have my bath at night or in the morning, Mrs. Messidge?"

Mrs. Messidge's face congealed into a fixed stare.

"Bath!" she said. "Bath?"

"Yes," said Julia. "I prefer it in the morning, but I know hot water is a problem in the country and you may find it more convenient to let me have it at night."

"I don't give no hot baths," said Mrs. Messidge as one repudiating an accusation of sin.

"But there's a bathroom," said Julia. "My sister saw it."

"Oh, that!" said Mrs. Messidge. "That was put in by the landlord before ever I took the villa. But it's only got one tap, and that cold, and only runs when we pump up the cistern, which we ain't doing now that my son's gone into the navy."

"What," gasped Julia, "do your other—your guests do?"

"Sluices theirselves down," said Mrs. Messidge. "You shall have a can of hot water of a morning, but if you want one at night as well that'll be sixpence a time extry."

"Could I have two cans in the morning with my early tea?" asked Julia.

"Early tea! Trays in the bedroom? I don't like it. I never did. People as as trays generally spill on the quilt before they've done, especially when there's two of them."

"But there's only one of me," said Julia.

"Yes, Miss Debenham, and you're expecting

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what doesn't go with single people. Not in rooms anyway."

Julia was nonplussed. There was some justice in the woman's impertinence. She was, by herself, occupying what the landlady considered to be accommodation for two people. Julia was not used to "rooms." She was manifestly ignorant of the etiquette which obtained between landladies of Mrs. Messidge's well-found and prosperous respectability and their—what was the word?—not "boarders"—"guests"—no! "people." She was giving orders as though she were in her own house or in some quiet, pleasant hotel where the service was good and orders were expected and carried out as a matter of course.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Messidge," said Julia Debenham. "I think I will go for a walk before supper."

"Up the lane on the left before you come to the George and then along a little white footpath and over a stile will bring you out on the downs, miss," said Mrs. Messidge, arranging Julia's walk for her. She had won her battle and was showing the first sign of those motherly qualities to which her Visitors' Book bore written testimony.

Supper consisted of two hard-boiled duck's eggs; thin bread and butter arranged in two rows between the billowings of the same d'oyley as had served the queen-cakes that afternoon; a glass of cold, fresh milk with the cream set on it (a thing which ever since her childhood Julia had disliked); some well-developed and extremely

pungent water-cress and a plateful of small, red, hairy gooseberries, their very profuse brown noses and very strong green tails still left on to add the final touch of the inedible to this always repulsive fruit.

Julia picked out fragments of the meal, unable to deny that it was good of its kind, but even more unable to enjoy breakfast food at this unaccustomed hour. As she nibbled and sipped she realised that she was helpless, for three whole weeks, in Mrs. Messidge's grip. Ada Parham had taken possession of the Maid of Honour house, and, as Mrs. Messidge had been careful to point out, the rooms had been "taken in writing until the 29th of June." And this was only the seventh. She could not afford to leave and pay for them, even if she had any other place to go to.

Mechanically Julia drew the Visitors' Book towards her. The little maid who had laid her supper had left it still on the fringed cloth which had not been removed since tea-time.

Opening it at random, at a sea-green page, she read :

"Mrs. Daventry Wadsworth and Miss Jane Batterne have much enjoyed their stay at Rose Villa and wish to recommend it as a home from home to others."

On the same page there were two more tributes : one from a young man on a walking tour who, being benighted, had enjoyed the twelve-and-sixpenny bed and breakfast of which Mrs. Messidge had already spoken. He did not refer to Rose Villa as a home from home. But the next

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writer did. His—or possibly her—entry was in verse.

*Oh Rose Villa, Villa of delights,
In it we've spent happy days and nights,
Of it we'll say wherever we may roam
Mrs. Messidge makes it a true home from home.*

(Signed). D. PROTHERHOK.

G. BAYLEY.

Julia read on. The panegyric record covered many years. The ink of the earliest entries was already fading. But the same note sounded, almost from the first. The slogan "A home from home" did not occur at once it is true, but about 1911 it began. At first it appeared in isolated cases. Once it formed the only comment of a certain Jack Burns who had written it diagonally across an entire page in a remarkably black and manly hand. There was, Julia felt, something a little defiant in the slant of the line, something a thought too exuberant in the twirl and flourish beneath the signature and around the date, July-27-29-1914. No later guest had emulated the size and position of this particular entry. Julia felt that Mrs. Messidge had set her face against such arrogance in other "people": though she had not been able, possibly she had not desired, to hold the hands of the Misses Beeworth, who, in the record for 1915, filled another whole page, having pressed and dried a few ferns and then pasted them on a pink background to serve as a frame for a snapshot of themselves in striped shirts, serge skirts, and alpenstocks with the

inscription, "*Two who have found a home from home at Rose Villa.*"

"Oh, you've found the Visitors' Book again, I see," said Mrs. Messidge, appearing to clear the table. "There's not many as has such a book to show. 'Ave you come to the gentleman of title yet?"

"Not yet," said Julia, snapping her lorgnon together and moving away from the table to allow of the passage of Mrs. Messidge's considerable person between it and the sideboard.

"Time enough for that to-morrow," said Mrs. Messidge with finality. "Your hot water'll be going up in ten minutes' time. I'll bring you in your candle when I've cleared away."

"It's not much after eight o'clock," said Julia, "and I should like to write some letters. May the lamp be lit?"

"Lamp?" Julia was beginning to dread Mrs. Messidge's repetition of the principal noun of her own last sentence. "Lamp? That lamp's been cleaned out for the summer. We're within a fortnight of the longest day. No lamps are lit in this house in June. All my people goes to bed either by daylight or when the candles is lit. I charge half-a-crown a week extra for the lamp. In the winter months."

As Julia carried a semi-transparent, triangular, grooved candle, supported in the socket of an enamelled tin candlestick by three dead matches, up the narrow stairs to her bedroom she wondered if the young man who had written: "*Mrs. Messidge has been more than a mother to me*" in the

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Rose Villa Visitors' Book had tried to sit up and read for an hour after his supper, and if he too had failed in the attempt.

The three weeks passed more quickly and more pleasantly than Julia, under the first impact of Mrs. Messidge's personality, had supposed they could. She gained several of her points. The lamp was filled, and though its light, muffled by a pink silk shade deeply fringed with yellow beads, strained her short-sighted eyes a little, she did sit up with it, as a matter of principle, until ten or half-past every evening. A large square tray, too, appeared at her bedside at eight o'clock with one cup of tea, rather lonely, in the midst of it, every morning, and, by collusion with Gladys, the little apple-cheeked maid-of-all-work who supplemented Mrs. Messidge's own rather steam-roller-like industry in the house, she secured a shallow and lukewarm bath once a day. She never sat in the arbour again. But the countryside was lovely, and as day by day her strength returned, she took longer and longer walks and found resting-places on the downs or under the hawthorns of a small wood behind Rose Villa where she could sit and read or dream through the long June days.

And with her strength her spirits rose. The Visitors' Book still engaged her attention, and she found herself planning to evade the occasion for writing in it herself, or composing some frank and protestant entry which should vie with one or two of the Parthian notes she had detected in the record.

The gentleman of title had, when discovered, limited himself to his signature : " Sir Thomas Drinkwater, K.C.B., Sept. 21-23." He was, she knew, a well-known Government official and had, so Mrs. Messidge informed her, in one of those unavoidable disclosures which the landlady regarded as part of the daily ritual between her and her guest, come down to investigate " some fuss " between the squire and the parson and the schoolmaster during the war. And, as the hall and the rectory were closed to him as well as the George (Mr. Wizzum the landlord being, though a churchwarden, on the squire's side), he had been obliged to seek refuge in Rose Villa.

" He said he couldn't trust hisself to write remarks," Mrs. Messidge explained. Julia determined at one time to follow his example.

But, on the day when, after a succession of thunderstorms and a consequent drop of twenty degrees in the thermometer she had asked for a fire in her sitting-room, she had inclined toward emulation of a Mrs. Drysdale, who had written only the previous Easter : "*I cannot express too strongly my appreciation of Mrs. Messidge as a good, plain cook and an indomitable manager.*"

The page was loose in its binding. An indignant hand had probably started to tear it from the book but had been stayed by the poem, inscribed above it, by Jamie and Nessie Mac-lagan, who declared that :

East and West hame's best

And a hame fra' hame is Rose Villa's nest.

But Julia's carefully polished acidulations were

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wiped from memory by the sight of Mrs. Messidge's bill. With "trays" and "baths" and "lamp," to say nothing of "3 fiers," "boots," and "charge for double bedroom," the sum total so far exceeded Maude's estimate of it that Julia might just as well have gone to Siena after all. Even with Ada Parham's nine guineas she would have to run into next year's allowance, to borrow on it in order to meet George's account. And to do so she must put off the renewal of her pilgrimage yet another twelve months.

Julia's hand shook with indignation and disgust as she drew the cheque which Mrs. Messidge professed herself willing to accept, though accustomed to "people as pays in cash."

"And now," said Mrs. Messidge, "as we've got the ink uncorked, perhaps you'll put your few remarks in the Visitors' Book, Miss. I always like to see my people write down what they may have to say about Rose Villa and my cooking."

Julia, still dazed, but obedient now, dipped her pen in the uncorked ink and wrote :

"*Mrs. Messidge is an excellent cook and a kind and attentive hostess. Her rooms are clean and comfortable.*" She paused, put a full stop after "comfortable," and prepared to add her signature.

"There's room for another line before you signs it," said Mrs. Messidge.

Julia knew what was expected of her. Without raising her eyes she added :

"*A home from home.*"

The Poet shuddered. "I have seen those

NAOMI ROYDE-SMITH

books," he said, as one might say, "I have seen the Medusa's head or Cannon Street Station."

"Congratulations and thanks, Miss Pogson," said Mr. Turpin. "I will avoid Mrs. Messidge: a name one could scarcely forget. One should be grateful to names, the sort, I mean, that remain in memory. I am reminded of one at the moment. . . ."

Mrs. Pennock hastily nodded agreement.

"I, too," she said abruptly; "a short name, but one not easily forgotten. He shall be the hero of the

FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE WOMAN DOCTOR"

THE WOMAN
DOCTOR'S TALE

ON THE BRIGHTON
FRONT, 1905

By JOHN PRESLAND

AFTER an interval of ten years they came face to face on the Parade at Brighton. There were not many people about, for it was a cold, gusty afternoon in March; the sky was a uniform grey, the Channel heaved in sombre grey-and-brownish swells along the line of shingle, the crests of the waves were whipped here and there into a smother of foam, but the tide was out and there was no thunder of seas on the cliffs of Black Rock to relieve the monotony of the scene.

Doctor Jim was walking along with his hands thrust into the pockets of his ulster and his lean, brown face sunk to the nose in his upturned collar; the chilly gusts of wind searched out the bones of a man who had known tropical fevers, and as he walked he cursed himself for being fool enough to think that a visit to Brighton in March was the right cure for a bout of influenza. It was detestable

weather, bleak and comfortless, but even more detestable was the prospect of sitting for the next three hours in the smoking-room of his hotel, watching other men drinking whiskies-and-sodas. Anyway, to-morrow was Monday, thank goodness, and he could legitimately go back to London and claim that he had finished his cure.

He noticed a tall woman coming towards him ; she walked with ease, in spite of the clinging folds of a long dark skirt which she was holding up with one hand and which was blown into volutes and folds by the wind. Nor did she seem to be struggling with her headgear in the irritating way most women had on a rough day, for she carried her head erect against the wind, and the hand that was not holding her skirt was plunged in a small muff. All the same, it was not the sort of day, he thought, that most women would choose for walking. They drew abreast of each other ; he glanced casually at her, then stopped with an exclamation.

" Mrs. Maltravers ! " he said.

She stood in front of him : no smile lightened the lovely face behind the meshes of the fine black veil, nor did she offer him her hand.

" Yes," she said, " it is I, Doctor Jim."

He felt a little dizzy ; it was ten years since he had seen her last, in the plenitude of her youth and beauty, standing in the drawing-room of her little bougainvillea-covered house at Wynberg, under the clear skies of the Southern hemisphere.

Ten years ago !

Before the tragedy of his life had happened,

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before she had betrayed him, his cause, his friends, had pulled down in ruin the Colossus of the nineteenth century, the man whom he had given his life to serve, whose genius was still the guiding motive of his existence, even now, when the man himself was dead, thwarted and unfulfilled.

He drew a deep breath and said : " It is ten years."

" Yes," she answered, " ten years."

Her voice had the old musical quality, that dropping cadence which was as haunting in its melancholy as the notes of a nightingale.

After those three words she said no more, and they were both silent, standing face to face on the wind-swept Parade between the changing monotony of the sea and the changeless monotony of the grey, unlighted houses.

All the memories of that past era rushed upon Doctor Jim ; he relived the old joyous excitement of the first inception of that scheme which was to add so substantial a clump of laurels to the wreath on Old England's brows, that bold stroke, half chivalresque, half buccaneering, like so many other episodes which had built up the British Empire, which was to settle the Transvaal question once for all and leave the wary and the carping to bicker over the accomplished fact ; he lived once again through the moods of impatience and disillusionment when he came to learn the insufficiency of the crowd at Johannesburg on whom they had counted ; like a flash he beheld the last bitter episodes, the abortive raid ; the humiliation of capture ; the unavailing regret for the gallant

men dead at his instigation ; the Transvaal prison ; the yelling crowds which tried to lynch him ; the threat of death ; the journey to England, stared at, sneered at, humiliated, pitied ; the trial and its dragging misery . . . Holloway gaol ! And behind all, dwarfing all his proper suffering, the cataclysm which ruined his friend, which strewn the last years of the nineteenth century with the wreck of that mighty career.

And it was this woman's hand that had touched off the train that had blown them all sky-high ; it was this suave and elegant creature who had handed to the Boer Secret Service just that bit of information—so trivial in itself it must have seemed !—which had brought the whole plan to failure.

He looked at her wonderingly ; did she know—could she at all realise what she had done ?

She was looking at him from under the folds of her black velvet toque with the eyes of a Medusa, unfathomable and stony.

He shifted his weight from one leg to the other ; what was he to do now ? He found it impossible to walk past this woman whose personality was so intimately woven into the chief drama of his life as if she were a stranger ; her treachery and his suffering had made a tie between them stronger than the tie of love or of blood, he felt impelled to talk to her ; though for ten years he had hated and despised her, they had, after all, the chief of all their memories in common.

He said : " Will you walk along with me ? " and she answered " Certainly, if you wish it " ;

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and turning, faced in the direction in which he had been going when they met.

They walked slowly ; he heard the faint rustle of the silk petticoat which showed a discreet edge under the hem of her lifted skirt, and glancing at her sideways over his coat collar he noticed the elegance of her silhouette, her short fur jacket, her neat black hat and the veil which prevented unruly wisps of hair from spoiling the perfection of her appearance on this gusty day. She was just the same then ?

He felt an ironic desire to laugh as he thought of the events of the last ten years ; the defeated raid, the spectacular fall from power of the greatest Englishman of his day, the waste and misery of the Boer War, the ruined political reputations, the shock to England's prestige, the still-unhealed scars of that tragic contest—and all the while Mrs. Maltravers had been pursuing her avocation, calling on her milliner, having her hair dressed, her nails manicured. . . .

He said to her harshly :

“ What are you doing down here ? ”

“ I live here,” she replied.

He looked along the Parade, where the wind whipped the puddles left by the recent rain in the depressions of the asphalt, and shivered at the melancholy of the scene.

“ Why do you live here ? ” he asked, and she said, in that quiet voice of hers in which it was impossible to detect any trace of bitterness, “ Why not ? ”

“ Well ”—he withdrew one hand from his

pocket to make a comprehensive gesture at the sea, the sky, the row of houses, the deserted pier—"it is not very gay, is it?"

"I am not very gay," she said, and added: "I expect you think I have no right to be, anyway."

Her frank acceptance of the blame for her misdeeds touched him now as it had touched him once before in the past, and he said more kindly: "I don't know, I've gone through too much to be very ready with condemning other people."

They had reached the end of the Parade and stood for a moment, looking out over the tumble of waters while a fine little spray blew up with the wind in their faces.

Doctor Jim hunched his thin shoulders up to his ears and said, more to himself than to her: "It's all over and done with, so many mistakes paid for, so many errors forgiven . . . I have been in prison."

"And I," she said softly, "have been in hell."

He turned sharply to regard her. She was holding her little sealskin muff just below her chin, guarding her throat from the wind; her eyes were cast down and her veil accentuated the beauty of her profile, touching nose and lips and chin with its shadowy mesh. Time had dealt lightly with her in the matter of beauty, thought Doctor Jim, whatever other tribute it might have levied. But what other tribute could it levy on a woman like her? So long as she had her beauty she had everything, he supposed—power, wealth, luxury . . . she was expensively enough dressed this afternoon, in all conscience!

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He laughed shortly. "Hell is a big word for little people, Mrs. Maltravers," he said. A ghost of a smile hovered over her mobile and charming lips, and she said: "Yes, and it's a big place for us little people, Doctor Jim; that is why we're so unhappy in it. Shall we walk back?"

He discovered suddenly that he did not want her to leave him just yet; if she was connected with that tragedy of his life, she was also inseparable from its drama, from the zest and splendour that belonged to the days before he was forty, when Cecil was still alive and the world was an oyster that awaited the opening. He said: "Wouldn't you like some tea; will you come to my hotel—or any other hotel you care for?"

She shook her head.

"No, thank you; I don't think I had better come to an hotel with you; I am known by sight to most people in Brighton, and there would be a certain amount of gossip about you if you were to be seen with me." She paused: "You see, although I live very quietly down here, I am still a marked woman."

"Because you are still a very beautiful one," he said, with a simplicity which removed his speech from gallantry.

"No," she said, "it is not that. But I sometimes feel as if I carried about with me the—the stigmata of the hatred Cecil must have felt for me when he learned what I had done."

She turned her face away from Doctor Jim and looked out to sea, continuing to walk by him with her smooth, stately step as she voiced her tragic

and fantastic thoughts. He touched her lightly on the arm :

" Let us sit here in this shelter, out of the wind," he said, " if you will not be cold."

She acquiesced and took her seat beside him, disposing her skirts discreetly round her ankles and then folding both hands inside her muff as it rested on her knee. She had a large bunch of violets pinned in the breast of her coat and the scent came up to him now they were in shelter from the wind.

" Tell me," he said, " why did you give him away ? "

" Because I loved him," she answered.

He gazed astonished for a moment and then said : " Once I thought you loved him, the last time I saw you. But surely that was not a reason for betraying him—rather the reverse indeed, unless you were actuated by jealousy—and I can't imagine that of a woman like you. Besides, he never cared for women, they counted for so little in his life."

" That was just it," she said mournfully ; " no woman counted, I least of all. And I had given him everything, you see, the whole devotion of my life, every thought, every hope, every passion, every sentiment, and he didn't know, didn't care, didn't reckon me of any value, would only, I imagine, have been amused if he had known what I felt for him and what I asked from him. So I put my hand into the middle of his life and broke one tiny little thread, just to show that I could, that I counted, just that I might not be ignored by

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that masterful and dominant personality. It took five minutes to do, Doctor Jim, and all these ten years have not effaced the bitterness of the memory."

Doctor Jim gave a little shrug and was silent. What could he say? He was not without bitterness himself as he thought of the tremendous issues involved in her act of individual self-assertion.

Presently she said gently :

"But because I loved Cecil, although I betrayed him, will you perhaps be kind enough to tell me how he died? I read the papers of course . . . it was a torment, for they said so much, yet so little that I wanted to know. But you were with him to the end, were you not?"

"I nursed him," said Doctor Jim. "I loved him too, Mrs. Maltravers. His death was the death of a Titan, an anguish, the dissolution of something gigantic. He fought death as he fought life, a lesser man would have been spared a fortnight of his death-throes. It was terrible—and yet like the man himself—terrific. He rests now on the Matoppos . . . peace to his spirit! May he brood over a new world."

He looked southward across the grey waters of the Channel, seeing in his mind's eye the gaunt, sun-burned rocks of those Rhodesian hills, where they had blasted out the solitary grave of the man who had been the inspiration and the faith of his life.

The voice of Mrs. Maltravers again broke upon his reverie.

"Did he ever, at any time when you were with him, speak of me?"

"No," said Doctor Jim; "he never spoke of you after that occasion when he told me you had given us away to the Secret Service. And then he did not altogether hold you responsible for the failure; he said you were only a contributory cause, and it was bound to have been a fiasco anyhow. You see, he did not blame you very much."

She sighed.

"I wish he had, but I see that was of too little importance."

After a pause she added wistfully, in a voice so low that it came to him almost like a faint flutter of wings from another world: "Did he never—even at the end—even when he was delirious—speak my name?"

"No," said Doctor Jim; "I never heard him."

"No," she whispered; "I suppose not. I couldn't expect even that."

The grey afternoon was drawing to a close, the clouds on the western horizon lifted to show a line of sullen yellow above the troubled sea, the wind was rising and little cold gusts and eddies pursued Doctor Jim and his companion even behind the glass and iron of their "shelter" as they sat side by side, linked by the shared memories of this moment more intimately than by a thousand tendernesses.

He thought he felt her shiver, and turning was in time to see a bright tear-drop hang for a

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moment on her lashes and drop with a tiny splash on to her muff.

He was a doctor and not wholly unused to the sight of women's tears, but the sight of Mrs. Maltravers in tears had the power both to move and to astonish him. She was so self-controlled, so poised, so much mistress of herself on all occasions that a mere feminine manifestation of distress took on with her a special quality, rather as if the Venus de Milo were to break her marble calm and weep. He patted her on the arm fraternally, she turned her head towards him and smiled faintly, her face was calm, unruffled in its beauty, there was no further trace of emotion and he might have imagined those falling tears save for a moisture still glistening on her eyelashes.

"Tell me about yourself," he said. "What did you do after—after you left South Africa?"

He had been going to say "after you gave us all away," but the last thing in the world he wanted was to be harsh to this desolate creature, and he substituted the vaguer phrase.

"I came back to England," she replied, "and I tried to be respectable. I sold my jewels and I lived on the proceeds in a middle-class English hotel. It was not a success."

"No?" he said.

"No," she replied; "the women did not want to know me; the men wanted to rather too much. I tried it for a while, perhaps I took a morbid pleasure in being uncomfortable, in letting myself be openly insulted by a crowd of vulgar people while you and Cecil were facing your own kind of

humiliation. Perhaps I was sentimental enough to feel that I too was making a reparation, though you would never know of it, wouldn't have cared, indeed, if you had."

"Wouldn't I!" said Doctor Jim with a certain grimness. "When first they shut me up in prison I used to get rather savage thinking of all the other sinners walking about outside. But go on."

She pursued in her beautiful suave voice: "One day I got tired of it all. I found myself involved in a vulgar and sordid row; an absurd little man lost his head, tried to make love to me, took to sending me notes; his wife found out about it, there was a scene—such a ridiculous scene, but so horrible!—the proprietor of the hotel was called in, I was requested to leave forthwith. Of course I did. I went to the Carlton and took one of their most expensive suites and I did what I had always done before."

She paused and readjusted the bunch of violets in her coat. Her movement wafted across Doctor Jim a little of her own warm fragrance, and he shuffled his feet and frowned uneasily. He wished the devil she hadn't told him that she had picked up another protector after the scene in the hotel; he would have liked to think that she had continued in the path of virtue ever since that South African cataclysm.

As if reading his thoughts, she said, with her head still bent above her violets:

"The advantage of being openly vicious, you see, is that at least you are protected from the

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insults of the virtuous. I was much less uncomfortable at the Carlton."

"Doubtless!" said Doctor Jim dryly.

She gave him a sideways glance. "You are disappointed," she said; "you wanted me to tell you a different story. It would have been quite easy to do so; you are not the first man to be vexed because I would not try to 'make the worse appear the better reason,' as Socrates puts it"—she gave a little smile to free herself from the accusation of pedantry—"in point of fact, I was tempted to do it once, not for my own sake but for his; the truth was so terribly painful to him."

"But still you told it?" said Doctor Jim.

"Yes," she said; "he was a young man, a boy, ten years younger than I, such a dear boy, chivalrous and romantic, the only creature in all my life who has ever loved me. I found it very hard to let him go."

"Will you tell me what happened," said Doctor Jim gently; "or would you rather not?"

"Oh! it was just the usual story," she said, "which has happened a hundred times; nothing unusual ever happens in a life like mine. He wanted to marry me, and when I offered to live with him he refused; he said he loved me too much and that I was too generous—it all depends, you see, Doctor Jim, on the point of view."

"Yes," said Doctor Jim; "I suppose it does." He thrust his hands deeper into his overcoat pockets and frowned moodily before him, her phrase had opened up for him the spectacle of that whole army of shadowy doubts which

threaten the guarded fortress of our convictions, wherein alone we can live safely and in comfort.

The point of view, it all depended on the point of view ! His own action, for instance, when he had headed that disastrous expedition ten years ago—to some it had appeared treachery, to some mere filibustering born of the basest kind of vanity, to some a piece of window-dressing to draw the eye from an elaborate financial deal behind the scenes, to some a simple romanesque adventure in the spirit of the sixteenth century . . . to himself a part of that gigantic scheme, an act in that world-drama which had been conceived in the mind of his friend. Yes, indeed, he had been astonished, when they put him on his trial, not only at the abuse which had been levelled at him, but at its variety, and no less by the diversity of the pleas which had been urged in his favour.

He gave a little chuckle at the recollection ; even in the misery of his failure his humour had been touched by the arguments of some of his advocates.

“ Why do you laugh ? ” said Mrs. Maltravers.
 “ I was not aware I had said anything amusing.”

She had every reason to feel affronted if she thought he were laughing at her last remark, and he hastened to explain.

“ The point of view,” he said ; “ it really was quite comic to observe the various interpretations of *my* little escapade. It was that thought that made me laugh.”

“ Yes,” she said ; “ of course I followed the account of your trial in the papers and I noticed

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all the things that were said. You came in for your share of abuse."

"Sticks and stones may break my bones
But unkind words won't hurt me,"

he quoted cheerfully.

She shook her head. "That is not true; anyway, sticks and stones are not very formidable weapons; but words are barbed things—once they are in they stick and can't be pulled out. Don't you still feel a pang, like a twinge of rheumatism in an old wound, when you remember some of the things your enemies said about you?"

"Why, yes," he confessed; "I suppose I do. But decent men don't sit down and cuddle their wounds in self-pity. Nor brave women either," he concluded, turning on her the full benevolence of his charming smile.

It awoke a little warmth in her starved heart, and she smiled in response, touching her lips with her little scented pocket-handkerchief while her eyes lost something of their stony despair.

"Do smoke," she said; "I know what a habit it is with you. Cecil used often to joke about it."

He produced cigarettes and managed to get one alight in spite of the eddying draughts of their shelter, and as he inhaled the first satisfying whiff, he said: "I've never been such a slave to tobacco since my go of 'quod.' The first few weeks I was there I would have given anything—even the very tattered remnants of my reputation!—for a cigarette."

"What," she said in horror, "you were treated

like a common malefactor, like a thief, your personal habits interfered with ? ”

“ Until I was ill,” he said ; “ after that it was better. But we all got our own bit of punishment ; you too, as I can see. Don’t let’s talk about it any more. What happened to the man who wanted to marry you ? ”

“ His mother came to see me,” said Mrs. Maltravers. “ I believe the mothers of rich young men entangled by adventuresses always do. It is astonishing how human beings consistently act according to the rules of melodrama, isn’t it ? ”

She favoured her companion with a glimpse of the subtle, ironical smile which he remembered as characteristic of her, and went on :

“ She may have come to hector me ; she finished by weeping bitterly. She told me I was too beautiful for her son to forget me as easily as she had hoped he would, if I would only send him away. That touched me . . . my heart . . . my vanity—how do I know ? . . . She didn’t offer me money, as women do on these occasions ; instead, she sat by me on the sofa and held my hand and talked about her son. He was her only boy, heir to a great estate and a famous name ; her husband was dead, she had no daughters ; her other son, the eldest, had been killed at Spion Kop in the war that followed your failure, Cecil’s fall. When she told me this I knew that I would never take her second son from her, and I promised that I would send him away so effectually that he would never want to come back. She thanked me, kissed me . . . ”

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Mrs. Maltravers's voice died away on the dulcet notes which Doctor Jim had always remarked as one of her greatest attractions, and after a minute she said, without raising her voice: "Of all creatures in the world mothers are the most selfish, are they not?"

Her muted tone conveyed a world of vehement bitterness, and Doctor Jim glanced at her in astonishment. He had always accepted the convention that motherhood represented the highest and most disinterested affection of the human race, and he was startled by this lady's iconoclastic statement.

"Well?" he said dubiously.

Mrs. Maltravers continued:

"She came to me and asked me to relinquish the one thing that was of value to me—his good opinion! His wealth, his title, marriage, all that was nothing, or so little, to me; but, by believing in my soul he gave me one, gave me what all the rest of the world, what Cecil—what you too, had denied me. And it was precisely that belief I promised to destroy. She thanked me and went home."

He laid his lean brown hand for a moment on her little sealskin muff, giving it a friendly pressure.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"I sent for him," she said, "and told him what I had done when I was in South Africa; how I had given to the Secret Service of an enemy country your plans and those of Cecil. I let myself appear in the age-old and detestable character of Delilah. He looked at me and went

white; his eyes darkened—he had such candid blue eyes—he made me repeat it twice, the whole story. Then he went away.

Next morning I had a letter from him, a wild letter begging me to say that it was not true, assuring me that he could forgive all else I might have done that the world would blame, all the actions that might have been dictated by the odious necessity of money, but he could not believe me guilty of this purposeless treachery. Those were his words, ‘this purposeless treachery.’”

She stood up and gathered her skirt in her right hand.

“It is getting very cold here,” she said quietly; “I must walk back.”

Doctor Jim rose also.

“And that was the end of it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered; “the end of it for me. I heard afterwards that he went very wild for a year or two, drank, gambled, dissipated . . . it cut very deep, you see, that ‘treachery’ of mine, for he loved me.”

She turned her delicate pale face towards the sea for a moment, and Doctor Jim watched her, noting the instinctive grace of her pose, her elegance, the mournful droop of her rather tired eyelids. Then she turned towards him, and passing her left hand in her little muff across her body, she took hold of her skirt with it, releasing her right for the gesture of farewell.

“Good-bye,” she said, holding out her white-gloved hand.

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He blurted out : " I don't like to let you go like this."

She smiled.

" Why not ? There is nothing you can do for me ; I have everything I want ; my present ' protector ' (her voice hung for a just perceptible breath on the ugly word) is a banker, an elderly man, very kind to me. I think one day he will want to marry me."

" I am glad of that," said Doctor Jim.

" Are you ? " she said.

" Aren't you ? " said he.

She shook her head.

" Since Cecil died," she said, " I am neither glad nor sorry about anything very much. The day I saw in the *Times* the announcement of his death I died too."

She gave him a whimsical smile, and added : " Go back to your hotel and get warm, Doctor Jim, and think that after all you have only been talking to the ghost of Evelyn Maltravers."

He made a sudden gesture of discouragement at the insoluble difficulties of a world that could waste in a life of idleness and humiliation such a creature as the woman before him.

" *Ora pro nobis*," he said sombrely.

She made as if to leave him, but with a half turn confronted him again, her head a little tilted against the muff which she carried coquettishly against her left cheek, and she smiled, a tender, delicate, enchanting smile which illumined her face with the soft glow of a sunset. With her eyes cast down she murmured :

JOHN PRESLAND

"But I forget to tell you, Doctor Jim, that I am very sorry I got you sent to prison."

He flashed an answering gleam at her.

From the crown of her head to the sole of her shoe he thought her the most charming woman he had ever seen.

"Oh! *that's* all right," he said; "I didn't mind; it did me good."

For a space there was silence, then:

"That was a long time ago," said Father Anthony meditatively. "I was at school when all that happened. To us, in those days, Johannesburg was just a place on the map; Rhodes and Jameson names in a newspaper—something less real than W. G., though more alive perhaps than Buffalo Bill or Louis de Rougemont. So much has happened. The war. Spion Kopf and Mafeking seem to lag very far behind Verdun and the Somme."

Again there was silence. It was broken by the voice of Mr. Turpin.

"I shall now tell you," he said (he spoke with decision),

"THE FIFTH DAY'S TALE OF THE COURIER"

THE COURIER'S TALE

THE GENTLEMAN

By ERNEST BETTS

I

IT was a year since Simon Brand had seen her. All that time she had been "studying" in Paris while he had been working with grave and single-minded attention at his briefs in London. A year ago, in the blackness of the curving road, where the trees shut it in and hid it from the world, she had said to him with witchery in her voice :

"Ah, my dear ; but in a year you'll have forgotten me." It was the first word of treason.

"Joanna, you know that's not true," he complained. "I'll come back in a year, and you'll come back, too. Now that's definite."

He had gone on solemnly and tenderly about his plans, and in absolute silence they had kissed underneath the trees, like lost beings. There was no moon ; not a star was out ; Nature seemed to have withdrawn from the scene, as if wishing to have no lot in their fortune, this way or that.

They had begun to walk quietly through the darkness to Low Thatch, where they were staying with the Maytrees for the week-end, when heavy

drops of rain drove them at a run the rest of the way, and he could say none of the words burning on his tongue for speech. The wind rose suddenly and from everywhere, and pitched into them like children. When they got back to the cottage it was already beginning to thunder—a strange, quick, early spring storm that astonished the very fowls in the farmyard.

And in this rounding of the weather upon them Simon knew that he had lost part of Joanna, and must set about recovering her all over again. In her, the storm seemed to set something free. She laughed and joked with Jessica and her husband and said that the bats were definitely in the belfry that evening. But in him something froze solid and covered up speech like ice upon a lake. The ripple went from life. He sat down moodily before the fire and became remote.

"Oh, well, you'd better go home again," Joanna had said.

"Perhaps I had," he answered.

"What's this I hear, children?" Mrs. Maytree asked with something mock-dramatic in her voice. She was lighting the lamps in the big living-room—the room that was drawing-room and kitchen in one. "Is it 'arsh words, children?"

"Simon has been making me feel old, Jessica," Joanna replied, and Mr. Maytree, putting down the Sunday paper, and as if he lived right outside the conversation, said quietly:

"I think I'll go to bed."

Simon watched him take off his old army field boots, kiss his wife under the lamp, and go into

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the bedroom. He was stirred. And just after, in the deeper emptiness that made itself felt as Maytree went out, Joanna had suddenly plunged the room in brightness for him by bending over his chair and whispering :

“ Simon—if I could marry anyone it would be you. But—you’re such a gentleman, aren’t you ? ”

The year had passed and he was sitting in the train, in which he had arranged himself with care, quaintly observing to himself that he was going to “ claim ” Joanna, much as mid-nineteenth-century heroes took possession of their coy and quailing brides, or Macheath his pale mistresses. He had had a note from the Maytrees to say that Joanna was there, and as troublesome as ever, and they had cunningly contrived matters in his favour. At once he had packed a few things in a haversack and taken the fast train which left Victoria for Bissett at two o’clock.

He would be there “ definitely ” by five. Of course (the Maytrees had added) he knew Joanna well enough not to build too surely on the sands of her character. He did not like this literary way of putting it. It was too true. There was nothing in Joanna to hold on to but her love, and he was not by any means sure of that. All the other things in his life were so simple and straightforward—matters of duty and routine ; of doing as others did. Perhaps he *was* rather a gentleman. Well, he was proud of the title, with so few gentlemen about. He guarded his reputation. Joanna, he knew, had had several love affairs in her twenty-

four years of life, but he told himself that they couldn't have been serious. For Simon, whose severe training and secret sense of superiority to the sex had kept him aloof from women and given him infinite assurance in confronting them, felt that it was almost his duty to settle Joanna's destiny out of hand, both for her sake and his own self-respect. He was thirty-five, and desired safety, settlement, the sight of himself as a husband, as somebody loved. There were no satisfactory mirrors to his life. The past year had clearly shown him that he must come to terms with Joanna, and bend his career to its final shape.

He did not profess to understand Joanna's "set." These people who went in for art, and wore ill-fitting clothes of flaring colour and had no manners—"no manners at all, my dear chap"—were beyond him. It was with a faint irony that he had seen himself, for nearly a year, waiting hand and foot on Joanna, enslaved by everything in her nature which he would have disapproved in the other women he knew. Other women? But he didn't know any other women. He only wanted one woman, and she would be his wife and bear him children and hold him high among mankind. If she could not make up her mind to this he would make it up for her. He knew that that side of him appealed to Joanna at any rate. He had mastery; he knew what he wanted.

Sitting in the train, he tried to see his course quite clear as it would now befall. By chance the day was much like that other day a year ago when the weather had so put out the harmony of his

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plans. The sky was heavy with clouds, the whole countryside sobbed with wetness, the wind flung itself against the trees and houses. Every time he had written to Joanna in the interval of her stay in Paris—the long, fretful, unsweet interval when, instead of replying to his letters, she had been painting, dancing, adventuring, idling in clever company—he had taken care to add another stroke of assertiveness to his wooing. He wrote punctually twice a week. His own work as a barrister gave a subtlety, almost a trickery to his pleading which himself he did not see and would have denied with a swordlike sarcasm if the fault had been laid to him. Joanna had once told him (he remembered) that his methods compared ill with those of a former friend of hers, Harry Bexby—oh, only a friend!—who just wrote to her when he had no better employment, and then it was to say that he hoped she was running into as many strange arms as tempted his own manly breast. Cynical, careless, idle Harry! And yet he was far from that; but his attraction, she had said, not noticing the lash of her words, was in this very neglect of the courtly, of all those soft English attentions and ardours which are the husk and salt of a man's possessive instinct. Bexby—bless him—was not like that. He denied her, he looked the other way. So few men could do such a thing. She drew a picture of Harry, with his dumpy body and blue eyes and thick tweed trousers and black coily hair that seemed to have springs inside.

“But, Joanna!” Simon had cried, and failed for speech.

He was always losing bits of her without warning. They argued and recoiled from one another and came together again ; but after these encounters he had the feeling that he was never quite forgiven.

" I've got an idea, Simon," she had said. " When we meet this time next year, I'll ask Harry down too, and you can fight for the trembling bride. I'd love that. Because Harry loves me, too, and you know how theatrical I am. It'd be thrilling."

" You'll not be such a little fool, Joanna."

" I've done worse in my time."

" Well, not in mine, please."

" I mustn't do any of the things that are really me, it seems."

" Oh, one or two perhaps. Now give me a kiss."

She kissed him, but with reserve on her lips. Then she took him back again with a little hug and kissed him passionately. After a while, thinking, as it were, behind this scene, she said :

" Simon dear, I think you're rather cool. You take things for granted that *aren't* always to be taken for granted—Mr. Brand ! One day you'll get a shock. I—I'm not always with you, you know."

" But you will be, my girl, one day," he retorted.

My girl ! How like Simon, how like all men—deep down.

II

The rain beat itself against the window of Simon's carriage, which he had to himself, and slid down the pane in runnels and spurts, as if

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trying to get through and drench him. This rain, the low inhuman skies, seeming every moment to come lower, the moaning wind, were all a little depressing to one bound on so vital an errand. They took all the colour from his reflections. But he had the carriage to himself, and he was thus able to look in the glass occasionally and note—with shame and disgust—that his face was pale, and that there was nothing to laugh at. Nothing to laugh at—nothing . . . His thoughts would not relax, his cheeks seemed held in an aching vice.

He realised now, as never before, in the stress and pleasure of money-making, that he was face to face with the whole of life, with all that the future could contain for him. The thought sat heavily upon him. How chilling the prospect was. He looked out of the window. How cold the whole landscape looked, how unwelcome. At one of the stations he rubbed the window-pane with his glove simply to get a glimpse of something that was not himself—of porters, trucks, houses, barns, smoking chimneys, the quiet paraphernalia the world had knocked together for its comfort. And as he did so he saw the name "Bissett" on a station lamp, and jumped, astonished and heart a-thump, out of the train on to the platform. So he was there! The train had arrived! Oof! the rain, the accursed wind, the war in things! They gave one devilish little peace. No; damn the porters, he didn't want any interference from them. . . .

The steady rhythm of his feet on the road, as he walked through Bissett (for there was no other

way of getting to Low Thatch, and the Maytrees' car was out of action) soothed him and sent currents of resolve running through his mind and body in a way that was familiar, almost inspiring to him. He had four miles to walk, and as his haversack, which he a little despised, swung on his back, he muttered "Jo-anna, Jo-anna," to himself, and smiled at last and took longer, more eager paces.

He was vaguely wondering how Joanna would look after so long a time, when he fancied he heard his own footsteps echoed behind him. The wind was in his face, and his soft hat was already soaked with water, and, although curious, he knew that if he looked round, all the water would go down his neck. He must hurry on. It was past four o'clock, and already the sky had lost something of its light, while grey, toneless reflections lay in the pools of water on the road and the jewelled drops trembling and running on the hedges wanted the icy sparkle of day-time. The wind was so fierce that as he turned the corner under the railway bridge, and so up the long hill to Low Thatch, he could scarcely comfort himself by uttering Joanna's name, he could scarcely speak at all, damn everything! At times the wind, with a punch, brought him to a dead standstill, and he cursed and flung himself onward as if in battle. It was during one of these pauses that he felt certain again that footsteps were pursuing him, cutting across his own in syncopation. He halted. There was someone behind. Tramp, tramp, tramp—it was unmistakable. Who could be walking this detestable

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road, miles from anywhere, on such an afternoon ? Could Joanna have been mad enough to get that other fellow down here after all ? If so someone was going to get hurt. They would all get hurt. He wheeled round and caught a splash of water in his face from the brim of his hat. The filthy rain ! Through an endless veil of rain he saw a short, dishevelled, hearty man, dressed rather like himself but bare-headed, fling an arm at him from the bottom of the hill as if in some sort of appeal. Simon paused in irritation. Evidently this chap had lost his way and expected help. Well, let him look alive and draw level.

He walked on slowly, brooding, a miserable object streaming with water.

"Hi ! . . . this 'asted 'ind . . ." a voice cried up the hill ; "im'ossible 'et a move on !"

The stranger laughed, as if wind and rain were enjoyable. A crank, whoever he was, Simon told himself. Something in the man's walk, in his thick hair and stubborn body, deepened his fear that this was the very man Joanna had mentioned to him. It would not immediately have struck him but for a gift of clear description, with all her words in high relief, which Joanna had. Her account of Bexby was very like this bug of a man. For two pins, he would knock him out for being in the landscape.

"Ah ! Sorry to stop you, sir," gasped the bug of a man, overtaking him. "This sublime weather ! Can you by any chance tell me the way to Low Thatch ?"

The stranger's eyes looked into his own with a

warm, animal expectancy, but Simon felt as if he had been hit in the chest. Without any hesitation he misdirected him :

"You've come a bit out of your way. First on the left and bear to your left, till you come to 'The Golden Apple.' It's about a mile ahead of you from there—row of cottages."

The stranger paused a second and looked curiously at Simon. A Londoner evidently. What was he doing down here on such a glorious afternoon? Well: thank you very much, he was glad they were not to be fellow-travellers, and with words of thanks, off he went in haste to his turning on the left. In a moment, he had disappeared, leaving Simon, angry and perplexed, heading straight for the cottage along the road he knew so well.

He reflected that he had had to lie to Bexby. At least, he *had* lied—a thundering good one, too. He would not hesitate to submit to any intelligent body of men that the case was clearly established for a lie. Bexby having evidently come down by the same train, it was up to him to reach Joanna first. A deep instinct which rose instantly to the surface with the warm, pleading glance that Bexby had given him down on the hill, told him that Joanna would go out at once to that treacherous warmth where he must fight inch by inch, word by word, to reach the same height of conquest. He must get there first and settle the matter at once. If she had made up her mind to have either man, she would have him

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who pleased her by some trifle rather than by any major virtue. A glance was enough. He was determined, therefore, by wit or subterfuge, to delay Bexby and get some message sent out to him by the Maytrees which would arrest him in his course altogether. He had lied, of course, but under extreme provocation. Public opinion would acquit him.

These thoughts flew about in his mind as he stood at pause in the road. He began to walk on again. He felt now as if he had been walking for hours. The wind still blew hilariously, the sky had quite darkened, and the low hills had a look of toneless peace.

There were two ways of reaching Low Thatch from the hill he had climbed. You could take the long route through Linley and round an immense sloping parallelogram of field and farm to Bissett Corner. This was the way Simon Brand had been coming, preferring the solid earth. Or you could cut across this parallelogram by a steep footpath, whose heavy mud the villagers avoided in bad weather. This was the way Harry Bexby was coming. For being unable to keep in his head any logical statement for longer than a couple of minutes, he had clean forgotten the route, and had asked a farmer's boy to re-direct him. The boy had told him, to his amazement, to retrace his footsteps, and slip along up the footpath across the fields. Bexby slipped a good three-quarters of the way, as directed, the mud seeming to take pleasure in trebling the difficulty of his movements. He rushed up the hill

furiously, conscious of dark powers coming up between himself and Joanna. So that, as Simon Brand braced himself for the last half-mile to Low Thatch and took the bend by Bissett Corner, he was quietly met by Bexby where the short cut re-entered the main road.

"That was an amusing thing to do—on a day like this!" he ventured cheerfully, with the smile of a man who cannot easily be put out.

"I was not thinking of the humorous side of things, Bexby, if you were. I take it you *are* Bexby, by the way?"

"Oh yes. Bexby is quite right. You don't look too humorous at the moment. Now let me try and guess *your* name."

Simon went up close to him, every muscle taut with rage: "Look here," he began excitedly. "My name's Brand—Simon Brand, and I've come down here to—to——" He broke off, unable to express himself further, and added hotly: "I don't know how you got here, and I'm hanged if I care, but if you've come down to see Miss Yorke, you'd better make up your mind to postpone it. That's definite."

"Postpone it? I don't think I can do that. I've had a telegram from Joanna——"

"A telegram? *You!* My God!"

"No. Nothing about God. Just a telegram, you know. I hate walking into people's cottages uninvited."

"You can set your mind at rest. You're not going a step farther, my lad. Understand that. I'm going to see that you don't."

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Simon put his hand on the other's arm and gripped it hard.

"Just let go my arm, Mr. Brand, will you? To travel hopefully is better than having a scene in the middle of the road."

A momentary scuffle took place between the two men as Bexby attempted to get free. Each knew that words could be of little use in this encounter, and stiffened for a fight. They had backed little by little to the cover of a brick-built cart-shed on the roadside, and stood together ankle-deep in a gutter full of water. The rain poured down coolly as if wishing to have no lot in their fortune, this way or that. But Simon, sickened by the smell of treachery, made a rush at Bexby, and cried in a bursting voice, in a voice he did not recognise as his own :

"It's you or me, Bexby !"

The shorter man crudely defended himself, unable to make head or tale of such a situation. He wrenched himself free.

"You can argue this out, Brand. I'm going on."

He made for the wet road, but Simon shot out after him, hauled him back to the shed by the collar, turned him round, and hit him with blind fury on the jaw. It was a neat stroke, full on "the point," and the little man went down like a ninepin. As he fell, Simon heard a faint "crick" like two bones struck together, like the "conkers" that boys crack at school. And then, looking at Bexby lying on his back on the ground, he noticed a strange, thick lifelessness overspread his face,

and bending down, that the puddle into which his head had fallen was moving with blood. Bexby had hit the back of his head on the staple of a cart-shaft lying with its end on the ground. His skull was cracked. There was nothing to be done.

He stood in the rain, dimly horrified, lost to common sense. It was quite dark, with only the lights of Brettenham, seven miles away, sending up a ghostly veil into the sky. His hat had fallen off and he could feel the rain making colder the coldness on his forehead. He felt now that he had his wits about him in astonishing profusion, marvellously clear, like gems; but he did not know what to do with them. Well; he must tell Joanna. And at the very sound of her name he was so overwhelmed that he felt weak, he could hardly stand up. He turned round in the rain to look at the dead man with the back of his head in a puddle. Dead right enough! The rain was washing his face. Well; he must tell Joanna; something must be done. On a main road like this he would soon be found out. He must go to the police-station and tell them.

“Good evening. I have committed a murder.

“I have committed a murder.

“I have committed a murder.”

He covered his face with his hands and began to walk on unsteadily to the cottage. It was the only landmark he knew in this part of the country. Ahead of him was a roadful of memories, where the land dipped and was made secret by the trees. There he had told Joanna that in a year he would

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come back for her. . . . He looked anxiously at his hands and clothes to see if they had any blood on them. No, not a stain ; quite clean. He would go on then, as if nothing had happened, he would go on if the whole infernal world chased him to the gallows. He would have Joanna, if only for an instant. Thank God it was dark ; he could live a bit longer in this darkness. His head was aching. He was shivering. A car, taking the bend, flung its searchlight full upon him and pinned him to the spot until its light had passed. The ground seemed unreal beneath his feet, the rain hot above him, and he could not keep out of his mind Bexby's puddingy face and black hair lying on the road. He must have been walking for years—with a great splash of blood somewhere in the middle of them. Well, here he was—at the cottage. He was beginning to spin round rather oddly. A great blanket of black, soft, warm clouds, shot with splashes of red, came down from all sides, and as he fell, something seemed to swing within him and move warmly across his chest.

“ He's all right now . . . ” they said.

Silence. Something was being moved on the kitchen fire.

“ Going to bed,” a man's voice added, and a woman's : “ It's all right, Simon, dear.”

What on earth were they all talking about ? He opened his eyes and had that feeling of waking unexpectedly in a strange place that is dark, when the night seems to be hundreds of hours late. There was her face :

"Is that you, Joanna?"

"Keep quiet, my darling. Yes, it's Joanna."

"Is it really you, Joanna?"

She bent down over him and smiled brilliantly into his eyes.

"Sh! It's late. Just rest yourself."

"Let me sit up. I must face them. O God! I——" His voice cracked, he was being strangled. She put her finger on his lips. "You don't know, you don't know," he cried. His voice rose to the roof. "Joanna, look!"

He got up from the couch where they had laid him, and stood in the yellow light of the room, shouting. "There, there, there! in the road, with his head in a puddle, damn him!"

Joanna gave a cry. "What have you done, Simon?" Her voice was as hard as a rock.

"I held him up. He was coming for you. I couldn't stick it."

"Then—you didn't get my wire?"

"Wire?"

"I sent you a wire, Simon. My dear! I wired you not to come. I couldn't—I couldn't—You must have started after it arrived." Her words trailed away thinly.

The bedroom door opened.

"Children, children, what's this I hear? D'you know it's past twelve?"

"It's all right, Jessica. For God's sake—get me—some brandy!"

There was a noise of shuffling feet outside, and a knock on the door. Joanna gave a high scream and sank on to a chair. For a moment a paralysis

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took the room. Then Mr. Maytree, in dressing-gown and top-boots, went to open the door. Simon held on to a table, the life already half out of him. He could not stand upright. A policeman entered, and in dead silence, said :

"Sorry to knock you up, sir. There's a body at the station just been brought in from Bissett Corner. Motoring party picked 'im up. There was a telegram in 'is pocket name of Bexby, this address."

"It's mine," Joanna breathed.

"Then in that case, miss, I must ask you——"

"You needn't do that," Simon interposed.

"I can explain all this. I'll come along."

He turned to Joanna to carry away, at the last, the image of her face ; but when she ran to him his arms hung slack at his sides. He did not want her now. He was old and had no feeling left. He just brushed her aside.

"I am quite ready," he said, and Mr. Maytree went to fetch a coat for him.

"I will come too," he said, and with their womenfolk watching them, the two men went out. But Joanna suddenly sent up a shriek, and rushed out to follow them. It was no longer raining. The night was crisp and clear. She followed them up into the enveloping trees, which still dripped heavily and whispered sagely to themselves. But without turning round to see her, Simon walked straight on between the policeman and his host with a firm step and the bearing of a gentleman.